



Research article

Casnovas and loyal men: Images of men in the Pangasinan short stories and novella of Amor Cico

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Abstract

The Pangasinan short stories and novellas of Leonarda Carrera are examined in this essay. Born in Mangaldan, Pangasinan, in the Philippines and with the penname “Amor Cico”, which refers to the weed known as “amor seco”, and means “dry love” in Spanish, Carrera was a skilled short story and novella writer in the tradition of Maria Magsano, the grand dame of Pangasinan literature, one of the eight major literatures in the Philippines. Even as a college student encouraged by her mentor, Magsano, Carrera was able to write short stories in the Pangasinan language, whose literary tradition had been orally passed down until the advent of printed texts, presumably during the Hindu-Buddhist period before the Spanish conquest. Literary criticism of Pangasinan literature is few and far between. As presented here, images of playboys and devoted men can be discerned in her short stories and a novella. Her works also served as a platform for her to criticize and lampoon society, a form of social commentary that highlighted issues such as government waste of resources. A number of her protagonists were also writers like herself. Her literary works reflect the period when they were written – the teaching of Spanish in the Philippine university curriculum, the Harry Stonehill scandal that rocked Philippine politics, and the glamorous romantic affair between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in the 1960s. But why is there a preoccupation with playboys and loyal men? Why has the emphasis on Don Juans and devoted husbands been given? In the conclusion, the reason for these is hinted at in Amor Cico’s poem.

Keywords: Leonarda Carrera, Pangasinan short stories, Pangasinan novella, masculine images, Philippine literature.

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One of the bright stars in the firmament of Pangasinan literature is Leonarda “Amor Cico” Carrera. A multi-awarded Pangasinan writer, she is one of the pillars of Ulupan na Pansiansiy Salitan Pangasinan (Association for the Preservation of Pangasinan Language), the only literary organization in the province. Aside from being short story writer and novelist, she is also a Pangasinan poetess. Carrera credits Maria Magsano, the foremost Pangasinan novelist and short story writer, for encouraging her to write short stories when Magsano was managing the Pangasinan Courier, which she founded. Magsano wrote the following novels: *Colegiala Dolores* (1950), *Bales na Kalamangan* (1952), *Samban Ag Nabenegro* (1954), and *Duksay Kapalaran* (1959). In 1960, a translation of *Samban Ag Nabenegro* came out as *My Sacred Oath*. Thus, under Magsano’s guidance, Carrera bloomed and matured as a Pangasinan writer. She has written a number of books and pocketbooks in Pangasinan and English, like *Tongtong 1* (2000b), *Tongtong 2* (2000c), *Sighs 33*, *Agnatukor iran Kaisipan* (2007), and *Moments* (2000a). Her pocketbooks have two covers and two titles because when you flip them, there’s the other title. Thus, you have one book with two titles. Her intention must have been to sell two books in one binding. Her short stories came out in *Tongtong 1* and in *Tongtong 2*. The first volume contains ten short stories, while the second volume has fourteen short stories. *Tongtong 1*, whose title is *Thorns of Roses*, contains her translated Pangasinan poems in English, an essay on her apostolate works, a short story in English, which is the title of the pocketbook, and a Tagalog translation of her novella. In the *Mother Dearest*, the title on the reverse side of *Tongtong 2*, are her poems glorifying mothers, some letter templates to moms, and verses from the Bible. In recent years, she has written devotional and spiritual books like *God’s Doorway* (2008), *God Calls for Holiness* (2008), *Amazing Grace* (2010), *Touching People with Love* (2011), and *Maispiriton Panangaro* (2012).

Pangasinan short stories can be traced to the “tumatagaumen” before the Spaniards arrived. They were persons who told stories and fables orally, called “tagaumen”. “Tongtong” in Pangasinan means “to tell”, “to speak” or “to converse”. It also means “to recognize” (Cosgaya, 1865). Another word is “olit”, which means “to recite or tell stories/histories”, an account that is repeated over and over, maybe a genealogy or origin stories of clans or the Pangasinan people. Then, during the Hindu-Buddhist period and when the West came, the writing tradition did not supersede but supplemented the oral one. Like many cultures, the people had a strong inclination toward storytelling and even gossip, which shaped the Pangasinan short story into a predominantly oral tradition. With the introduction of writing in Latin letters, Pangasinan short story originated with the stories of saints, Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ in the Pangasinan translations by Dominican friars, maybe even the sermons.

Pangasinan literary criticism is few. Romulo, as an undergraduate at the University of the Philippines, wrote probably the first survey of Pangasinan literature. Later, while a master’s student at Columbia University, he analyzed the short stories of O. Henry, pen name of William Sydney Porter. As president of UP, he released his criticism of American novels from 1890 to 1930. Legasto studied the works of Pangasinan zarzuela writer, Pablo Mejia, her grandfather. Rosa Maria Magno examined the literary pieces of the father of Pangasinan zarzuela, Catalino Palisoc. Iluminada Magno, reviewed the works of Magsano, Palisoc, and Mejia. Nelmida scrutinized the images of women in the novels of Magsano.

Magsano, a social worker and a teacher, founded the Silew in 1934 and sang its swan song in 1943. Then, in 1948, the Pangasinan Courier was revived with a Pangasinan literary section, Sandiy Silew (In Lieu of Silew), where Magsano acted as the literary editor. According to Rosa Maria Magno, in the early sixties, the name of Leonarda Carrera as a short story writer was familiar in the Pangasinan literary scene along with Juan Villamil, Nena Mata, and Francisco Rosario. Carrera's short stories were published on the pages of Sandiy Silew. The publisher would pay P 5.00 for each short story. But Magno would find the reason for these youngsters why they wrote Pangasinan literary pieces in their literary idol Magsano who was at that time the leading and best-selling writer in the province.

Of Greenhorn Lovers and Studs

Why Amor Cico would know the psychology of men when she is of the opposite sex is quite a marvel. In the short story "Maetan Panibeg" (Unripe Love), Erning, the protagonist in the short story, is planning to go out one early evening when his younger sister, Minia, observes and teases him that he is going to court ("onkaraw") because the guy could not make out what he would do to his hairdo; he keeps on combing hair being unsure if his look is good to go or not. Now a young bachelor ("balolaki"), he denies this and tries to silence Minia because he does not want his mother to know anything about this. Minia, however, would threaten to tell it to their mom. Nonetheless, Erning reacts that he would also report to their mom something about her. It turns out that Erning is privy to the secret between Tito and Minia when Tito returned the book he borrowed with a letter hidden between the pages. Having revealed this, Minia's cheeks turn red. He went out through their back door so that his mother would not detect that he had gone out.

Erning straightens out his pants and remembers how difficult it is to convince his mom to buy him the pants. Carrera would make a flashback when his mother, Iska, would ask why he needed the pants. The husband, or Erning's father, would interject that her son is already getting prepared to court while he is reading the newspaper. He would reveal that when he was courting her, he was only fourteen. Iska would reply that he is teaching badly to their children, and through her, Carrera is saying the moral of the short story that education is better than courting here and there. After that flashback, Erning is back to the real world when he is planning to serenade in front of the house of the girl he liked, the so-called "petek" or "to go in front of something". Carrera utilizes another flashback when Erning remembers the invitation of his friend, Pekto, to serenade. He agrees to join them to avoid being called "gay" ("siyoki") (Tongtong 1, 4) because in Pangasinan and Philippine culture when a man is incapable of courting a girl, he becomes a butt of jokes. When he agrees, Pekto declares that he is the man ("satan so laki") and adds that the girl is "blue seal," meaning mestiza or fair-skinned lady. Carrera brings back Erning in front of Nana Epang's store near the house of the girl he would be serenading. He would buy a cigarette when he overhears two older men talking, and it looks like the two are addressing their conversation to him, because that is what Carrera would like to do. One of the men sighs, why the young men now would rather not scrutinize the girls they want to court, and reveals that the girl Erning is interested in was a hostess in Manila. When he hears this, he is stupefied ("ameneng") (5). He nearly forgot what he would buy, and he wants to leave the place immediately. He almost tripped in the speed at which he walked and realized that "time is long. There are many girls that I can choose from" (6).

While in this short story, Carrera has caricatured a greenhorn lover in Erning, in her short story “Naibong ya Panibeg” (Spilled Love), she paints a man who is a playboy. Two college students are in Manila to enrol but Diego, the protagonist described as courting one girl after another, “karaw diman, karaw dia” (7), a rich kid, wants to go places but his classmate refuses at first since they had to register in the school. They end up in a restaurant. Diego who has an eye for pretty ladies could not take out his eyes on one because the girl is “tall, ‘slender’ body, ‘coca-cola body’...papaya-shaped face, long, curly blacker than night hair. She looks like a mannequin” (8). His eyes would not leave the girl and he boasts that he would get to know the girl, that in a few days he would have conquered the girl. Lito, the studious type, did not say anything because he knows Diego’s caliber as ladies’ man. In the words of Carrera, “he had courted many women who said yes to him and he left them. Diego’s list of girls he let them cry is long already” (8). All the girls are beautiful and from good families because they cannot refuse Diego when he courts because he would shower these “victims” with many gifts including the parents. Thus, Diego invites Lito to follow the girl where she goes. They take a taxi and suddenly the vehicle turns to a place. Both realize that it is a cabaret. Diego is in disbelief until the taxi driver confirms it. Carrera uses an idiomatic language that Diego shakes his head that it can be almost plucked like a fruit, “naburbor so ulo to”.

Like in the previous two short stories whose main protagonists are confronted with a hilarious dilemma ending in a realization that love cannot be rushed, in “Betang Mo Labat” (She’s All Yours) Carrera has the same motive using two characters – Delfin and Mario – two cousins studying in Dagupan. The setting is the university. Delfin realizes while in university grounds that his cousin, Mario, is in love at first sight, saying to himself: “That person really is something... He acts like he always does. Jesus Christ! Like the one he just saw. Good if his mom did not tell me to take care of him!” (9). Carrera brings a flashback where Delfin’s aunt would tell him just that because she fears that only courting girls Mario would do.

Pangasinenses believe that intelligence is communicable, and this aunt would wish that Delfin could transmit his good brains, “maung ya inpangulo” (13), to his cousin. If he is not bright, his parents who are farmers from Manaoag, would not let him study. He is in front of a classroom because he is looking for Mario when a classmate tells him not to block the way. The unnamed classmate jokes that maybe he is looking for prospective girlfriend to court. He denies this but this classmate asks if he is still not yet love stricken or what he calls “amoretis” from the word for love in Spanish, “amor”. He denies this strongly and suddenly he asks if he saw his cousin. The classmate told him that he saw it somewhere, near the gate of the university. He rushes to look for Mario. And lo and behold he saw him there who keeps on looking at girl who are passing by. Yesterday, like a flashback, Delfin remembers what happened to Mario when he was told that he hit a girl while he is entering their classroom and from that moment on, he is lovestruck. They are going home with Mario saying that he had her first to which Delfin said she’s all his, meaning he has no interest whatsoever. Then, suddenly, a pretty girl passes by, mestiza, five feet two inches in height, her beauty compares with the candidates of Miss Universe, a “Venus who descended on earth” etc. In short, a gorgeous lass. It is the girl whom he accidentally hit when he was entering a classroom. Immediately, Mario befriends the girl, talking along the way, but the girl would not respond even a bit. Then, they are in front of the house of the girl with him exclaiming how big is their house and finally she responds but she has difficulty forming her words because she is tongue-tie, “anges”. Delfin could not contain

his laughter walking as fast as he could and repeats what he told his cousin that she is his, punctuated with a boisterous guffaw.

Here, Carrera is repeating what Pangasinenses usually say among those who are lovestruck at first sight. They would comment “singang akakanengneng na bii o laki” or “it looks like they haven’t seen a woman or a man”, meaning they have immediately put their hearts and minds on someone but they would regret it later on upon learning that there is something wrong about them.

In “Jackpot”, Carrera continues with her short story of love with this Pangasinan customary belief that eyes can disillusion men and appearances deceive. Danilo is a college student who had just arrived home when he is preparing again to leave the house because he was invited by his friend, Amado, to visit and court another girl. His mother gets livid because he has just left his books but she sees him in front of the mirror. When asked if he is to court, Nilo, his nickname, is a funny son who would joke to his mom that he is now a young bachelor and that he would bring two degrees – his BSC and MD – not medical degree but marriage degree. Three whistles are heard and he goes down to meet his friend who is impatient because Nilo tarried. Amado who is courting the girl but he thought of introducing Nilo to the girl’s younger sister. Off they go on a taxi and stops on a big palace-like house. A pretty girl opened the door. Nilo is shocked when he sees the sala complete with all the furniture. The lass realizes that she is talking to the person who always tops his class who is no other than Nilo. Nilo humbly denies this but he said to himself that he hit a jackpot because of her looks and their status in life. She is the younger sister who excused herself to call her elder sister. Manding, Amado’s nickname, also exclaims that they both hit a jackpot. The mom of the two girls, a seamstress, meets them when all of sudden two men arrives asking for the money to be paid monthly for the appliances. The two decides to leave the house and they saw a vehicle where they are putting all the appliances of Mrs. Manalas. Nilo comprehends while they are inside the jeep that he could identify the mother who is also a dressmaker like his mom without a shop.

Again, the image of a playboy is repeated in “Aguik Itan!” (She’s My Younger Sister!). Carrera usually pairs the main character of a short story with an opposite character, a person with an unlike behavior to show a contrast. Delio and Dante are law classmates and basketball players in their school. Nonetheless, the two had differences. While Delio had courted many lasses that cannot be counted by the fingers, Dante displays a different perspective when it comes to women. He is like “a dead clam”, “inatay a lukan”, according to Delio, which means he does not know how to deal with the opposite sex. On the other hand, Delio believes that a chicken will not eat the rice grains even in front of it; thus, a man should take the initiative. Delio is smarting from the fact that Dante did not give him a ticket to the ball in their place. Fortunately, the person whom Dante gave a ticket gave his ticket to Delio. Dante is always leaving the school in a hurry, which made Delio to wonder. Then on this night, he goes to the dance and see Dante dancing with a girl. And as he teases Dante that he will not bother him with the girl, Dante reveals that she is her younger sister with a warning that he is “off limits” to her sister. That night, however, he dances with Nilda and seems to be in love with her. Yet, he cannot reveal this openly because he fears that this would make Dante angry. Then, one afternoon, there is a basketball game in Dante’s village. Delio is invited. He makes it a point to visit Nilda in their house. He is captivated by Nilda’s looks that he kisses her fingers. Nilda shouts and leaves the sala. Delio leaves the house and decides not to attend the games. The next day, Dante is

indignant why Delio did not go because his sister did not finish the games due to the fact she did not see him there. Thus, in the end, Dante lets Delio meet Nilda and even calls him brother-in-law such that the Casanova is now permitted to get close to Nilda.

Educated, strict, loyal men

In “Agui Ya Anggad Pagew” (Sibling Up to the Chest), Carrera departs from an image of a playboy to her protagonist, Felix, a naughty if not playful, yet educated man, who is courting another girl but who has secret feelings for Nida, his baptismal sibling by virtue of being the godson of Nida’s father, Old Bestre. He is like an immediate family member who can go in and out of Nida’s house, even eat there without getting ashamed. Hence, when he teases Nida, it is just normal between them with no hard feelings like when he jokes that the cooking of Nida is salty even though he has already swallowed several helpings of rice and the dish. They are both solo child in their family. He is a lawyer while she is a teacher. Although Felix considers her as a sister, he begins to show discomfort when he sees Cesar, also a lawyer, going into the house of Nida because Cesar is courting several women and he knew Cesar’s irresolute bearing. When Mario, also a teacher, starts courting Nida, his feelings begin to unravel because Mario is a good man. Since they are just neighbors, he could see the two sweetly conversing and talking. He did not know what he did it but he goes to drink that night and became drunk. Then, one day, his mom tells him to visit Nida on the other side because Nida is resenting why he has not visited them for a while. A gleam of hope awakens in him so that he goes to visit Nida who told him that if he is okay to have him as her escort in a school gathering to which he replies yes to her “even escort forever” (41).

In “Lorna’n Reina” (Queen Lorna), the images of men are seen in the professor of psychology whom the students call “Mr. Panot” in reference to the man’s little hair on his head. He is strict and prone to anger. But he is replaced by another man, young, looks like a cadet, and does not wear eyeglasses. He has smiling face when he asks who drew a sketch of an old man, hunchback, with spectacles that nearly cover his face on the blackboard as the students are trying to guess what would their professor looked like. Lorna as the main character is surnamed “Reina”. Beautiful and funny, she is being teased if she would be the last to get a boyfriend. But when the new professor arrives in class, her classmates begin to joke that she had found her king. After the class, a car stops in front of Lorna and her friend who is their professor inviting them to join him in the vehicle.

Becoming a lady is the theme of Carrera’s “Baby Rebecca”. Rebecca, the youngest in the Sevilla family, is always late in waking up. One day, she stirs early to the consternation of Milo, the elder brother, and the mom. She is seen cleaning the yard with a broom. Now, she does not like to be called Baby because she is now a lady. When her brother would treat her to buy lollipops, she complains that she is now grown-up. That afternoon, two boys visited their house who brought her flowers. We can see here an image of a man being a dotting brother while the two suitors are described as “modest”, “masimsimpit”, while they are seating on the sofa. After waiting for a while Rebecca, the three are said to be “uneasy”, “kusokuso”, which is understandable since it is Rebecca’s first to entertain suitors at home. Having seen what is happening in the sala, the mother grasps even shedding tears that her daughter has come of age.

It was the first among her short stories that Amor Cico uses the telephone in a conversation between two friends, Victor and the narrator, in “Ugaw Ni Tan” (She’s Still Young). Victor is a member of a fraternity and at one of its sponsored dances, he danced with the younger sister of the male narrator. He asks about Tita, the name of the sister, in the telephone and the narrator suspects that Victor has a special feeling for her, a fact he is able to verify when Victor visits their house. All are out except the narrator because it is Sunday. Tita also went out to play. Victor, however, is curious where are the others. To confirm his suspicion, he brings two cans of beer. Then he asks pointblank if Victor has a crush on Tita, which he did not answer directly. After gulping the beer, he asks if there is no more calling the narrator brother-in-law. Later, Tita enters the home after a game of patintero. Their eyes met and there is a spark. But the narrator is quick to say that the girl is only fourteen years old but has grown to be robust as a girl. Victor replies that there is still another time since he can wait. The narrator believes him because “when Victor loves, he loves until the end of his life” (56).

Writers as protagonists

In the final short story of *Tongtong 1*, Amor Cico once again uses the telephone as a medium for her characters to communicate in *Wrong Number*. The protagonist, Nelly, answers a call from an unfamiliar voice, Rudy Jeremias, who introduces himself as her new acquaintance. Nelly finds him rude and unrefined, dismissing his attempt at familiarity. A devoted reader of Rey Amores' novels, Nelly is unaware that her friend Lita has secretly arranged for her to meet Amores on her birthday. Meanwhile, Rudy persistently calls Nelly’s house, prompting her to instruct someone to answer with “wrong number.” On the day of their meeting, Nelly is shocked to realize that Rey Amores is none other than Rudy himself—his pen name concealed his true identity. Recognizing his voice, she blushes with embarrassment, recalling how she had dismissed him as rude during their phone conversations. If the previous story depicted a writer as persistent and patient, Carrera introduces another literary figure in “*Kerew ya Agamoran*” (Fulfilled Wish). Lito, a writer seeking solace and inspiration, travels to Baguio in hopes of overcoming his writer’s block and preparing for a national contest. Struggling to find a compelling theme, his aunt suggests visiting Mirador, home to Our Lady of Lourdes, where he might find inspiration. Carrera subtly expresses admiration for Maria Magsano when Lito recalls a story by the renowned Pangasinan novelist in which two characters also meet at Mirador. With this in mind, he scans his surroundings before ascending the three hundred steps, hoping to spot someone—and indeed, a woman follows behind him. Though he wishes to wait for her, his shyness holds him back, fearing she might find him arrogant. Instead, he turns to the “blue book,” where visitors write their wishes.

Carrera references the Stonehill Scandal of the Macapagal administration in the early 1960s, when Lito recalls Stonehill’s blue book, frequently mentioned in newspapers (*Tongtong 2*, p. 3). He reads the last entry, in which a supplicant promises to return with sampaguita flowers if her mother’s healing wish is granted. It dawns on him that the writer, Angela, must be the woman he had just seen. He asks if she is Angela and hands her the blue book, but she insists that he write first. In his entry, he expresses gratitude to the Virgin Mary for allowing him to share in Angela’s joy and thanks her for making this day unforgettable. Lito remains until Angela gives him the response he has been waiting for—her brightened expression suggests

affirmation. Through his devotion to the Virgin Mary, Lito finds the inspiration he sought, allowing him to continue his writing journey.

As in her other short stories, Carrera explores love between college students in “Agew na Valentino” (Valentine’s Day), featuring Yoly, a BSEED student, and Val, a journalism student at an unnamed university. Like Delfin in *Batang Mo Labat* (She’s All Yours), Val is an outstanding student and the editor of their student publication, *Letakan*. He persistently tries to court Yoly, but each time he brings up the idea of dating, she frustrates him by insisting that he already has Celia. The two first met in their Spanish 3 class, and despite her resistance, Yoly seems to harbor feelings for Val. She contemplates giving him a Valentine’s card or a birthday card and eventually buys both. The next day in class, she hands Val the birthday card, while the Valentine’s card remains tucked inside her notebook. Val later takes her notebook, discovers the card, and realizes it was meant for him. Coincidentally, Val had also bought a card for Yoly, teasing her that he would be waiting for their Valentine’s Day date.

Carrera revisits the theme of Valentine’s Day in “*Isasambot Ya Valentina*” (Valentine’s Date to be Rushed), centering on Delfin, a selective college student when it comes to dating. Unlike the playboy characters such as Delio and Diego, Delfin is bookish and more focused on his studies. His older sister, Fely, often teases him, suggesting that his classmates might secretly call him a “sissy.” As February 14 approaches, Delfin grows anxious about not having a date, fearing a repeat of a previous dance where he only partnered with his friends’ girlfriends. He insists on finding a beautiful and intelligent woman, prompting his friend Celso to joke about his impossibly high standards. Undeterred, Celso introduces him to a lady writer, Miss Lagrimas de Amor. Delfin eagerly prepares for their date, but on the day of the meeting, Celso discovers that Lagrimas has suffered an accident that has affected her ability to walk. In contrast to Carrera’s other stories, where rushed love leads to unintended consequences, *Amor Cico* appears to challenge the possibility of romance between a woman with a disability and an able-bodied man.

Amor Cico seems to have a preference for male characters who are writers, as the protagonist in “*Lost & Found*” is yet another editor of the university publication. However, the central figure in the story is May, a commerce major. She realizes her book is missing when she notices a bulletin board announcement about a lost pocketbook. Hoping it is hers, she heads to the Vision office, the university publication’s headquarters, to retrieve it. Upon entering, she finds Manny, the editor, typing away on a typewriter—desktop computers were still a thing of the future. Manny Caballero, as it turns out, already knows her name and used the lost book as an opportunity to meet its owner, May Sevilla, a star student in her department. Manny is a known playboy—handsome, intelligent, and charming enough to captivate any girl’s heart. May, however, has heard all the gossip about his many conquests and despises him for it, even criticizing the girls who, in her view, failed to use their judgment in falling for his advances. But one Sunday, Manny visits May’s house and confesses his true feelings to her. Though she does not verbally respond, her eyes give him the answer he has been searching for all along.

In “*Bantay Amitay*” (Guard Who Hangs), *Amor Cico* employs an unnamed narrator in a humorous yet subtly sensual short story. This time, the narrator is a young boy who still plays *tatsing* and *sipa*. His unmarried aunt, Celia, is closely guarded by his grandfather, Bindoy, who insists she be watched at all times—even when she washes clothes in the Angalacan River at Barrio Guesang in Mangaldan, the story’s setting. Grandpa Bindoy assigns the narrator, his

grandson from a nephew, to keep an eye on Aunt Celia in exchange for money, clothes, food, and school expenses. Another man, Paking, Grandpa Bindoy's godson, also takes turns guarding Aunt Celia, especially when she attends dances. Though hardworking and diligent, Paking's playful nature annoys Aunt Celia. Whenever he has free time, Paking lingers at Aunt Celia's house. One afternoon, the young narrator refuses to leave because he wants to see the polo shirt his aunt is sewing. Sitting beside him, Paking teases, "Yes, I know it! You keep watching over your aunt, and now that she's fifty-three, you still don't have an uncle!" (23). Aunt Celia playfully confirms this but jokes that perhaps Paking is the one who's actually that age. Paking denies it, humorously claiming he is "sweet sixteen." Aunt Celia scoffs, retorting that what he really means is sixty—after all, a sixteen-year-old wouldn't be toothless. Paking, who had recently visited the dentist, reveals that he is planning to get false teeth, adding another layer of humor to the exchange.

With the growing commotion, Aunt Celia becomes irritated and orders the two to leave. However, Paking interjects, insisting that it is his turn—in English. The narrator notices a meaningful exchange of glances between Aunt Celia and Paking, though he does not fully grasp its significance. To distract the boy, Paking offers him money to buy a Pepsi, which he eagerly accepts, leaving happily. Later that afternoon, when the boy returns home, he finds Aunt Celia and Paking engaged in conversation near the sewing machine. It appears they are holding onto something. With Paking's back turned, the boy enters the room, unnoticed by him but seen by Aunt Celia. Startled, Paking quickly lets go of whatever he was holding, his cheeks flushing red. He awkwardly asks if his polo shirt is finished, only to discover that it remains untouched since he last saw it. That night, Aunt Celia rushed to complete the sewing, as the boy needed to take the shirt with him on his vacation to his parents' home in Barrio Malatava, Lingayen. Concerned about leaving, he hesitates, but Grandpa Bindoy reassures him that Paking will watch over Aunt Celia. The boy considers telling his grandfather about his suspicions, but before he can, Aunt Celia arrives to take him to his barrio. He spends only three days there before Grandpa Bindoy unexpectedly comes to fetch him. Upon arrival, his grandfather tells his parents, "I kept having her watched. All the while, the one who was guarding is the one who will hang" (26), revealing that he had caught Aunt Celia and Paking in the act. In the boy's mind, this can only lead to one inevitable outcome: a wedding.

Carrera employs the technique of contrasting two male characters in her short story "Ataki de Corazon" (Heart Attack), referring not to the physical ailment but to the figurative heart. As is typical in her works, the protagonists are two students—Erning, her second character with this name, and Delio, also a recurring protagonist. Amor Cico's preference for commerce students is evident, as both are enrolled in the same course. Erning is a libertine who firmly believes in love at first sight, while Delio, skeptical of such notions, frequently mocks Erning's dreamy behavior—his distant gaze and distracted demeanor. However, Delio's perspective shifts when he meets Lorna, the cousin of Divina, whom Erning is courting. After the dance, Delio finds himself unable to forget Lorna's face, tossing and turning in bed as he experiences the very emotions Erning had described. While Delio in the previous story is meticulous about choosing romantic partners, "Aglá Mamapasnok si Divina" (Divina Is Not Angry Anymore) presents Alex as a man who is slow to act when it comes to love. He harbors deep feelings for Divina and finally decides to confess by slipping a long-written love letter into a book she borrows. He had lacked the courage to send it before, but now he seizes the opportunity. Unexpectedly, when

Divina discovers the letter, she becomes furious with Alex. The next day, Alex attempts to apologize, but in his clumsiness, he trips over a stone. Despite the mishap, he manages to tell Divina that he will visit her house the following day. When he arrives, he spots Divina at her window, but as soon as she sees him, she quickly shuts it. Determined, Alex buys a cigarette from a nearby store, hoping to see if she will peek out again. When she does—this time without closing the window—it gives him the courage to finally knock on her door.

In “Under Initiation”, Carrera uses the phrase associated with fraternity and sorority rites to explore the budding romance between two college students. Felix and Lorna meet when Felix undergoes initiation for a fraternity he hopes to join. As part of the ritual, his master instructs him to present a rose to a beautiful girl and collect her personal details—all while sporting lipstick marks across his face. Lorna graciously accepts the rose and provides the requested information. The next day, Felix offers Lorna another rose. Over time, their friendship deepens, and he eventually suggests accompanying her home. Lorna declines, fearing that others might assume he is her boyfriend. Seizing the moment, Felix asks for permission to visit her house instead. Lorna warns him that her father is strict, but Felix boldly declares that he is ready to face any initiation rite necessary. When Lorna vaguely mentions the direction of her house, Felix insists she can simply tell him the way. To this, she responds, “That’s your problem.” Unyielding, Felix confidently states, “It is settled” (39). As a master of love stories, Carrera once again delves into romance in the entertaining *Say Kapalaran nen Perla ed Horoscope* (Perla’s Fate According to the Horoscope). The male protagonist, Nestor de la Torre, is a writer who goes by the pen name Nick Piedad. Perla, the female lead, does not believe in horoscopes, as suggested by the title. One day, she meets the man destined to be her love while traveling to her barrio. He sits beside her, engrossed in a magazine featuring his favorite author, Piedad. Accidentally, he nudges her foot. Assuming he did it intentionally to spark a conversation, she ignores him, inwardly labeling him as rude. He apologizes, prompting her to finally look at his face.

Carrera has a penchant for describing attractive male characters, portraying this man as having “brown, papaya-shaped face, soft eyebrows, not flat nose, wide forehead, and a bit curly little hair on his forehead”—a look “especially attractive to the eyes since he resembles a cadet officer” (41). Perla merely smiles and returns to flipping through her magazine. As she skims the pages, she stumbles upon the horoscope section, which predicts that she will meet someone on the vehicle who will become her husband within the week. Suddenly self-conscious, she struggles to compose herself. Meanwhile, the man beside her asks to borrow her magazine. He, too, turns to the horoscope section and chuckles at the writer’s mischievousness, reading that he will meet the person he is destined to bring to the altar—coincidentally, the same horoscope Perla had just read. At that moment, he introduces himself as Nestor de la Torre—the writer himself! Since he lives nearby, he frequently visits Perla’s house, and eventually, she accepts his courtship. One day, Nestor arrives to discuss their wedding plans, but Perla suddenly realizes something. She retrieves several magazines to confirm her suspicion—that Nestor had lied when he claimed not to know the writer behind the horoscope section. One by one, she reads her past horoscopes, including one that states, “Prepare now because during these days, the lucky man will ask for your hand in marriage.” She calls him “a fortune-teller” (44) and playfully strikes his shoulder with the stack of

magazines. When she attempts another hit, Nestor grabs her hand and holds it for a long time—until she finally agrees to let him inform her parents about their wedding plans.

Nearly all of Carrera’s short stories revolve around love, including “Agnasukat Ya Aguinaldo” (“Immeasurable Christmas Gift”), which is set during Christmas. Unlike her tales of college students and their romantic misadventures, this time, Amor Cico introduces Noel, a professional office worker. He has been courting Lina, a teacher, for quite some time. Every Saturday night, Noel visits Lina at her home. One Christmas, Noel is particularly determined to secure the “yes” he has long been waiting for. Lina promises to give her answer on Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve, they attend mass together. As they walk afterward, Noel brings up the topic again, but Lina remains silent. Frustrated yet hopeful, he grabs her hand and presses it. To his delight, she presses back, causing his heart to leap with joy.

In “Español Cuatro” (Spanish Four), Carrera reveals that as early as 1960, there were calls to reduce the 24-unit Spanish requirement in college to just 12 units. The story follows Edgar de Dios, the editor of his university’s publication. Their professor, Mr. Guerro, is a short, bespectacled man known for his strictness, quick temper, and tendency to fail students. He has earned the nickname “The person who has horns” (nansaklor). During roll call, Edgar’s name is mentioned, and a classmate recognizes him as the university publication’s editor. Meanwhile, Mr. Guerro calls on Miss Vilma Español and takes the opportunity to humiliate her, remarking that she must study harder to live up to her surname. He then reiterates his strict no-cheating policy. Discouraged, Vilma and another classmate consider dropping the class, but Edgar convinces them otherwise. This marks the beginning of their friendship both inside and outside the classroom. Edgar, a strong student, frequently lends Vilma his assignments and even allows her to copy his answers during exams, leading her to score an impressive 94 percent. Secretly in love with Vilma, Edgar expresses his feelings in an article for the school publication. However, Mr. Guerro doubts Vilma’s high marks, publicly shaming her by claiming that in Spanish 3, she only knew “sí” and “no.” Outside class, Edgar hesitates to reveal his essay to Vilma. Yet, she soon discovers the publication he carries and immediately reads his column, realizing his feelings for her. Smiling, she playfully counters Mr. Guerro’s claim, saying that she actually knows three Spanish words—including “gracias.” Overjoyed, Edgar finally feels his love reciprocated.

Social Criticism

Carrera’s final three short stories serve as sharp social critiques. In “Say Una-Unan Sueldo nen Do” (Do’s First Salary), she examines two contrasting types of employees—Diego, who eagerly awaits his wages to spend on drinking, and Ronaldo, nicknamed Do, who understands the value of money, having been raised in a hardworking and disciplined family. Do, about to receive his first salary, grew up under the strict guidance of his father, who forbade him from joining a fraternity. When he asks for money to buy pants for an induction ball, his father instructs his mother, Pilang, to bring out the pants he wore for his wedding and have them altered to fit Do. Determined to earn his own money, Do decides to work, believing that his salary will grant him the freedom to buy whatever he wants. However, the day before payday, his father tells him to hand over his entire earnings. Though shocked and frustrated, Do controls his emotions. Upon receiving his first salary of five hundred pesos, Do dutifully delivers it to his father, who happily counts the bills and then returns two hundred pesos to his son, who, all along, had been

contemplating refusing the money. His father then invites him outside, leading him to a bank. There, he fills out a deposit slip for five hundred pesos, explaining that a first salary is like a *buena mano*, a lucky start.

In “Panumbukan” (Principle), Carrera skillfully portrays a man of integrity, Edmundo, through an unnamed male narrator, his relative of the third degree. This short story stands out as one of Carrera’s most nuanced character studies of a male protagonist. Edmundo, raised in poverty by a blacksmith father and surrounded by many siblings, refuses to relive the hardships of his childhood, where meals were uncertain, dependent on whether money was available. He takes four years to complete a secretarial course, not due to academic struggles but because he works as a student laborer, working during the first semester and studying in the second. Though offered financial assistance for his education, he declines, believing that earning his diploma through his own efforts is the only honorable path. He avoids vices such as smoking and drinking. When graduation arrives, Edmundo chooses not to attend, lacking the funds for the event. The narrator visits his home and offers him thirty pesos so he can participate. Reluctantly, Edmundo accepts the money on the condition that he will repay it as soon as possible. Days pass without any news from Edmundo. Meanwhile, the narrator, a writer, submits a short story for publication. Eventually, Edmundo reappears, prompting the narrator to ask if he has married. Edmundo has been in a five-year relationship with Laura, a dressmaker, and hopes to marry her, but he remains unemployed due to a lack of job vacancies. During his absence, he worked alongside his father in carpentry. He then returns the thirty pesos to the narrator. The narrator considers recommending Edmundo to his uncle, who has political connections. Days later, Edmundo approaches his relative, complaining about his new workplace. He wishes to be transferred to another department, as he cannot tolerate the inefficiency and dishonesty he witnesses. The office has only one typewriter for multiple employees, and workers are instructed to slow down their tasks to stretch the workload throughout the day. By 4 p.m., their work is complete, leaving female coworkers to powder their faces and admire themselves in mirrors. When inspectors arrive, they pretend to be busy, only to relax once the scrutiny ends. Frustrated, Edmundo declares, “Thus, I do not wonder why the government has wasted a lot of resources. I will never go back there!” (61-62). The narrator tries to dissuade him from resigning, warning that his position will be quickly filled by the long queue of people eager for government jobs. However, Edmundo remains firm, unwilling to spend money he did not earn honestly. The narrator then offers him a job at a factory he had built using his savings. Edmundo quickly adapts to the work, and thanks to his patience and diligence, the factory soon turns a profit. Through this story, Carrera subtly critiques the inefficiency and corruption in government offices—an issue as relevant today as it was then.

In “Fiesta’y Inatey” (All Souls’ Day), Amor Cico once again criticizes men who prioritize pleasure over their familial responsibilities. Lito, Perla’s younger brother, stands before a mirror on November 2, preparing for a dance. His actions irritate Perla, who is getting ready to replace their mother at the cemetery, where she watches over their father’s grave. A heated argument ensues. Lito expresses resentment toward their father, claiming that he favored Perla, his *papa’s* girl. Perla counters, arguing that their father had little reason to love Lito, who spent his time with friends while she diligently studied, ensuring that none of their father’s hard-earned money went to waste. Despite the quarrel, Lito proceeds to the dance, unaware that the girl

he hopes to court, Marietta, is absent. Stricken by guilt, he heads to the cemetery, hoping to find her there—and indeed, he does. Marietta explains that she chose not to attend the dance, knowing that her father would be waiting for her on this day. She shares a poem she wrote, titled *Father*, stirring deep emotions in Lito. His heart pounds as he recalls his own deceased father, finally confronting the weight of his neglect.

Loyal lover

In her novella *Matuan Panangaro (True Love)*, published in 1982, Carrera presents a tragic love story between Richard Monteverde, an engineering student from Manila, and Celia Rosal, a journalism student from Dagupan City, both studying at a university in the capital. Divided into seven short chapters, the novella begins with their first meeting on June 7th at a waiting shed while they wait for a jeepney home. Richard accidentally nudges Celia as she retrieves coins that have fallen into a canal. To apologize, he theatrically drops another ten-cent coin, making it three, and references *Three Coins in a Fountain*, saying in English that he hopes his wish comes true. Somewhat arrogant, he seizes the moment to introduce himself and learn more about Celia. Upon hearing her name, he immediately recites Ben Jonson's poem *Song to Celia*, praising himself without waiting for her acknowledgment. He even boasts that his mother had a fondness for Richard Burton, the famous Welsh Hollywood actor, when she was pregnant with him.

In the second chapter, Carrera delves into the characters' backgrounds and personalities. Celia carries herself with aristocratic grace, never showing anger toward Richard. She has no male friends and, at twenty years old, spends her free time reading books. Orphaned, she has an older sister who moved to Manila with her husband. Celia is in her third year of college when her sister, Anita, invites her to live with them, prompting her to leave her beloved grandparents in Dagupan. Richard, on the other hand, is the only child of a wealthy family, the sole heir to multiple properties and a sugar business. Though he owns a car, he avoids using it, believing it attracts too much attention from women. His mother's advice to choose his romantic partner wisely is deeply ingrained in him, warning that he could be pressured into marriage. Since Celia is not easily won over, it takes time before she agrees to be his girlfriend. Despite owning a car, Celia never rides in it, forcing Richard to take jeepneys and public transportation just to be with her. Celia never takes advantage of Richard's generosity—when they go on dates, they split the expenses equally. She attends mass daily and prays the novena, a devotion Richard adopts to stay close to the woman he loves.

Carrera subtly aligns herself with Celia, as revealed in the third chapter when Celia graduates *magna cum laude*, mirroring the author's own academic achievement. Her relatives celebrate her success, and with an induction ball approaching, she needs a consort. She decides to invite Richard, calling him on the phone. Without hesitation, Richard rushes to her house, thrilled to learn that she has chosen him as her escort, signifying that they are officially a couple. After the graduation ball, Richard presents Celia with a special gift, a music box that plays *Three Coins in a Fountain*, commemorating the day they first met. That night, Celia allows Richard to kiss her on the cheek for the first time, and they dance together until dawn. From then on, Richard showers her with gifts—books, cards, chocolates. Both families wholeheartedly support their relationship, strengthening their bond even further.

Years pass, and Celia begins working as a part-time teacher at the university where she graduated while also contributing regularly to a magazine. Meanwhile, Richard becomes a licensed engineer. Once again, Carrera's life parallels Celia's. Richard is now eager to marry Celia and has already drawn up plans for their future home. With no reason left to delay the wedding, Celia agrees. The following day, April 17th, Richard's birthday, he presents her with a diamond ring, explaining that it once belonged to his grandmother and was later passed down to his mother by his father. They marry on June 7th, the anniversary of their first meeting. As they settle into married life, Richard proves to be a devoted husband, leaving behind his social life to come home promptly after work. He frequently brings gifts for Celia, pocketbooks, fruits, and rice cakes. Like many couples, they hope for a son as their first child. Celia recalls a fortune teller's prophecy that she would first have two daughters, followed by a son. The old woman also warned her that when she reached the age of twenty-nine, she must strengthen her faith to endure a significant trial. One evening, Richard surprises Celia with a gift. He asks her to turn around and places a diamond necklace around her neck, teasing:

"Is Burton the only one who can give a diamond to Elizabeth? One more...

I am also Richard, am I not? Am I not also Elizabeth? Oh... even ten

Elizabeth could never replace you..." (116)

In the fifth chapter, Celia gives birth to a daughter, followed by another girl. Still longing for a son, she continues praying novenas. Richard is a loving father, playing with his daughters and showering them with food and toys. Four years later, Celia decides to try for another child. She conceives, but it turns out to be a false alarm. Soon after, she begins experiencing headaches, dizziness, nausea, and a loss of appetite. Hoping a change of scenery might help, Richard suggests a trip to Dagupan, where they can enjoy the fresh beach air and visit Celia's grandmother, Bai Andang. They rent a cottage, and their time together feels like a second honeymoon, as suggested by the title of the sixth chapter. However, two weeks later, Celia's migraines return, forcing them to leave and seek medical attention in Manila. At the hospital, tests reveal a devastating diagnosis: brain cancer. Surgery is impossible, as the tumor is located deep within the brain. Celia begins treatment, but Richard, desperate to save her, takes her abroad to consult specialists. Unfortunately, the prognosis remains unchanged. Before returning to the Philippines, Celia insists on visiting the Virgin of Lourdes in France. There, she confesses, repents for her sins, and prays for a son, recalling that she has missed her period for two months. However, the news of her pregnancy does not bring Richard joy, he fears that carrying the baby will further endanger her fragile health. Despite his concerns, Celia remains resolute in her decision to have the child. After seven months, she gave birth to a baby boy. Two years pass, and Celia's condition worsens—her body grows frail. On December 8th, her 29th birthday—the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—she remembers the fortune teller's warning. She asks Richard to celebrate her birthday in Baguio City. At their hotel, they are assigned room number 313, which Richard finds ominous. Throughout the day, they visit religious sites—the Pink Sisters Church, Baguio Cathedral, the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, a Chinese temple near Burnham Park—followed by lunch at Camp John Hay and a final stop at Mines View Park. That evening, over dinner, they reminisce about their past. Finally, Celia utters the words she had long hesitated to say, the phrase that lovers use to express their deepest emotions: "I love you" (129). That night, they went to bed. Richard oversleeps. After waking, bathing, and dressing, he gently tries to wake Celia, only to realize that she has left him forever.

Conclusion

Carrera's short stories reflect the era when Spanish was still a standard part of college and university curricula, as exemplified in "Español Cuatro", written during the height of the Stonehill scandal in the 1960s. Harry Stonehill, an American businessman, controlled major industries in the Philippines and became a central figure during President Diosdado Macapagal's administration (De Viana). Despite Macapagal's reputation as "the incorruptible," Carrera references the Blue Book, which contained records showing that Macapagal—along with other influential figures such as Ferdinand Marcos, who would later defeat him in the next presidential election—had received bribes from Stonehill. A former U.S. Army lieutenant stationed in the Philippines, Stonehill first recognized economic opportunities while overseeing American military supplies. Starting with a small trade in Binondo selling threads and needles, he discovered Filipinos' love for Christmas cards and began importing them from the U.S., eventually dominating the local market. His business expanded as he moved into selling army surplus goods. After his military discharge, he returned to the U.S., but seeing greater prospects in the Philippines, he relocated permanently, leaving behind his wife, whom he divorced before marrying into an elite Filipino family. Stonehill co-founded the Universal Trading Company, engaging in import-export trade with a business partner. Over time, he built a vast empire encompassing industries such as glass, oil, tobacco, petroleum, media, publishing, and real estate. Tobacco became one of his main sources of revenue, putting him in direct competition with U.S. tobacco companies. Seeing him as a threat, the American government, its tobacco industry, and even Chinese businessmen sought ways to undermine him. Recognizing how susceptible Filipino politicians were to bribery, Stonehill quickly gained influence over government officials. However, these politicians underestimated him—unbeknownst to them, he documented every bribe he distributed in his Blue Book. When Macapagal finally moved to prosecute Stonehill, he realized that nearly all leading politicians—including members of his own Liberal Party—were implicated in the book. To protect himself and avoid scandal, Macapagal ultimately chose to deport Stonehill rather than pursue legal action.

Carrera's novella similarly reflects the historical and cultural context of its time. References to Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor are remnants of the era in which she wrote. Burton, a renowned British actor, and Taylor, a celebrated Hollywood star, frequently starred together in films, most notably the 1963 blockbuster *Cleopatra*. Their romance captivated the public, though they were initially married to different partners. After divorcing, they wed—twice. Carrera's mention of a diamond necklace draws parallels to the Taylor-Burton Diamond, a legendary gem purchased by Burton for Taylor. Known for showering her with extravagant jewelry, Burton became particularly interested in acquiring this remarkable 69.42-carat pear-shaped diamond while vacationing with Taylor in Switzerland. Both coveted the stone, leading Burton to send an agent to bid on his behalf at an auction in 1969, setting a spending limit of \$1 million. However, the prestigious jeweler Harry Winston also vied for ownership. Ultimately, Cartier House secured the diamond with a winning bid of \$1,050,000. Determined not to lose out, Burton swiftly negotiated with Cartier, offering \$1.1 million for the gem. Cartier accepted, and the diamond was delivered to the couple in Monaco, where they were attending Princess Grace of Monaco's 40th birthday celebration. Carrera's reference subtly alludes to one of the

most famous diamonds in the world, worn and cherished by Hollywood’s iconic romantic duo, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

Carrera’s reference to Three Coins in the Fountain draws from both the 1954 romantic comedy film and its famous theme song. The film follows three American women in Rome who, after tossing coins into its fountains, wish to find true love. The song, performed by Frank Sinatra, was prominently featured in the movie, which starred Clifton Webb, Jean Peters, Dorothy McGuire, Louis Jourdan, and Maggie McNamara. The screenplay was based on John H. Secondari’s 1952 novel of the same title. Several distinctive elements emerge from Amor Cico’s literary works. Her short stories reflect Carrera’s middle-class upbringing, as most of her male characters belong to this social class. Only two—Edmundo in Panumbukan and Delfin in Betang Mo Labat—are depicted as coming from lower-income backgrounds. Meanwhile, Richard from Matuan Panangaro is one of the rare wealthy male protagonists, alongside Diego from Naibong ya Panibeg.

Another notable pattern in Amor Cico’s writing is the dominance of male characters over female ones. Among her short stories, only four—Lorna’n Reina, Baby Rebecca, Wrong Number, and Say Kapalaran nen Perla ed Horoscope—feature well-developed female leads. In most of her works, women serve primarily as objects of pursuit, while men take center stage in the narrative. The portrayal of men in Carrera’s 24 short stories and one novella largely revolves around college students who fit the archetype of Don Juans or Lotharios. While most are intelligent and well-educated, only one character, Mario from Betang Mo Labat, deviates from this pattern. Additionally, four of her male protagonists are writers, emphasizing the literary profession in her stories. In her novella, Celia, a journalism student, regularly contributes to a magazine—an evident nod to Carrera’s own foray into writing, inspired by her idol, Maria Magsano, editor of Pangasinan Review, who guided her early career.

Carrera’s deep connection to Mangaldan is evident in her short story Bantay Amitay, which is set there. She was born in Barrio Guesang in 1942, inside a man-made cave during the Japanese occupation on November 6th (Andaya). Why does Carrera so frequently depict womanizers in her works? Could this stem from an unconscious fear, in Freudian terms, of falling victim to philanderers? At the same time, why does her novella present a loyal male protagonist? Given her generation’s values, which upheld marriage as a sacred institution, loyalty was paramount in relationships. Despite her keen understanding of male psychology, Carrera could not escape her own worst fears. She later revealed that her husband was unfaithful, leading her to file for annulment. As a poet, she expressed her anguish in her poem Inkaindan Ya Aro (Forsaken Love), which serves as a fitting conclusion to this essay.

Alay sakit na sugat na aakbiten ko
 Nen akalmo kay sananey ya aroenmo
 Kuanko agak nabilay no andi kad diking ko
 Ampait so kanen ya onsabid sungot ko
 Antoy ginawak ed sikan kasalanan ko?¹

¹ How painful is the wound that I am carrying / When you found someone to love / I said I cannot live when you are not beside me / Bitter is the food when I swallow it / What sin did I commit against you?

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