

When Barthes Meets Ben: Barthesian Semiologies in Selected Short Stories of Bienvenido N. Santos (BNS)

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ABSTRACT

In literary criticism, the semiotics of Roland Barthes, a widely used approach in popular culture, is rarely applied to short stories, particularly in Philippine diaspora literature, as evident in the dearth of studies conducted in the field. To fill this gap, this study aims to unveil the ideological underpinnings in Bienvenido N. Santos's (BNS) four selected short stories by conducting a two-level semiotic analysis of their representation of Filipino-American experiences of exile. For the first level of analysis, the short stories' intrinsic elements, such as images, characters, characterization, setting, figures of speech, and dialogues, were examined to demystify the signifier-signified relationship. For the second level of analysis, the ideological functions behind the myths were discussed. The Filipino-American exile is a Filipino with a sense of pride in fulfilling the American Dream, a pursuit of a better life, and who aspires for financial stability, social mobility, and greater opportunities for one's self and family. In realizing this American Dream, there is a hegemonic group that imposes its norms on the citizens of one of its former colonies. This study, anchored on Barthes's semiologies, proves that literature, like popular culture artefacts, may entrench colonial beliefs instead of playing the ideal role in decolonial resistance if not closely read. Future researchers may apply the Barthesian framework to Philippine literary texts, other BNS's anthologies, other authors, and 21st-century diaspora literature.

Keywords: Philippine diasporic literature; Roland Barthes's semiologies; Filipino-American exile; American Dream

INTRODUCTION

Filipino migration to the United States has deep historical roots, tracing back to the American rule over the Philippines from 1898 to 1946 (Pacoma, 2020, p. 263). During this colonial period, Filipinos migrated primarily as students, workers, and members of the U.S. military. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2014), between 1910 and 1938, over 14,000 Filipinos arrived in the U.S. as students, while many others temporarily worked in Hawaii. Following Philippine independence, continued emigration was driven by economic hardships, political repression, and enduring ties to the United States (pp. 3-4).

Churchwell (2021) cites the Oxford English Dictionary, defining the American Dream as “the ideal that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative.” For many Filipinos, the American Dream concept transcends personal success, symbolizing economic and social security for future generations. The American Dream is seen as a path to financial stability while maintaining cultural identity and community support, blending Filipino values with the American ideal.

Literature allows Filipino writers to explore and critique the Filipino diasporic experiences of the American Dream. It is a powerful medium for expressing Filipino immigrants' struggles and triumphs, enriching their narratives beyond mere statistics or historical facts. The literary works of Filipino writers reveal diverse perceptions of the American Dream within the Pinoy diaspora. While some depict success stories of resilience and pursuit of prosperity (Sitorus, 2019, p. 11;

Varalakshmi & Kasyap, 2019, p. 79), others highlight the struggles with discrimination, cultural identity and the challenges of class, gender, and ethnicity (Maravalli, 2015, p. 4). The characters portrayed in different literary texts written by Filipino writers often embark on the Filipino quest for identity construction (Balgoa & Lim, 2016, p. 85); Zeng, 2022, p.101; Saroj, 2016, p. 1) but face limitations that expose the American Dream as a deceptive ideal due to oppressive social and political systems (Ruiz, 2022; Sitepu, 2020, p.1).

Few studies critically analyze portrayals of the Filipino exile pursuing the American Dream. Balgoa and Lim (2016) applied Homi Bhabha's "third space" theory to show how literature negotiates colonized identity within and beyond colonial frameworks, challenging dominant ideologies. Esperanza (2021, p. 6) used autoethnographic and textual analysis methods to differentiate the first- and second-generation Filipino perspectives on the American Dream, noting that the first generation seeks better opportunities while the second views it with gratitude and a drive for independence. Based on these critical reviews, the application of semiotics to Filipino-American fiction remains underexplored.

Bienvenido N. Santos (1911-1996), a Filipino-American post-war writer, portrayed in his fiction the struggles of first-generation Filipinos who migrated to America for prosperity and stability. While the Filipino-Americans reconcile their dream of solidarity with the American Dream of individualism, they are torn between preserving their identity and embracing a new culture. Santos's fiction has been extensively studied, focusing on themes of alienation, nostalgia, desperation, disillusionment, and racial discrimination experienced by Filipino U.S. immigrants. (Davis, 1996, p. 139; González, 2017, p. 39; Rico, 1994, p.91; Roa, 1984, p.116; Wulandari, 2011, p. 1). These works shed light on Filipino immigrants' personal and sociocultural challenges in assimilating into American society. However, a closer look at the extant research on Santos reveals a limitation in that semiotics has not been used as an approach to analyze his fiction. In fact, Roland Barthes's semiotics theory, a widely used approach in popular culture, is rarely applied to short stories, particularly in Philippine literature.

In contrast, Roland Barthes's semiology is commonly applied to Western canonical literature, especially poetry and short fiction. For example, Pertiwi (2010, pp. 21-32) analyzed symbols in Valentine's poetry, revealing their meanings and functions. Similarly, Talibong (2021, p. 165) applied Barthes's Denotation-Connotation Theory to Kilmer's poems, finding themes focused on nature and God. In their studies, Güzel (2023, pp. 1261-1267) and Sembiring et al. (2020, p. 254) applied Barthes's semiotic code theory to Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, showing how hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural codes enrich narrative structure and meaning, particularly in "The Black Cat" and Poe's other horror stories. Barthes's semiotic codes enhance the depth of Poe's stories, showing how the codes are integral to creating complex yet engaging narratives.

Current studies have shown how semiotics decodes cultural symbols, signs, and ideologies in media studies and popular culture, including in the Philippines. Filipino scholars extensively utilize Barthes's semiotics to uncover meanings in cultural texts, including tricycle signages, films, internet memes, YouTube video clips, photojournalistic images, and popular music. Joyce and Miguel (2016, pp. 50-55), for example, examined the signages of 100 tricycle drivers in Tuguegarao City using Barthes's multiple layers of sign systems to uncover how these signages reflected Filipino optimism, masculinity, religiosity, values, and traits. Similarly, Ancheta (2016, pp. 776-788) applied Barthes's semiotics to analyze the images of a central character in the film *Himala*, revealing Elsa, the female protagonist's challenge to patriarchy. Expanding semiotics to the digital realm, Calimbo (2016, pp. 7-16) used Berger's Semiotic Theory of Humor and Barthes's

myths to analyze selected Philippine political internet memes, showing that Filipino humour often serves a deeper social function.

Only a few Filipino scholars have applied Barthesian semiotics to analyze various media and cultural artefacts, highlighting its potential to unveil ideological messages. Liwanag and Demeterio III (2016, pp. 57–62) analyzed the 15 most popular video clips of Petra Mahalimuyak, finding that video clip production promoted the hegemony of powerful groups. Demeterio III (2020, pp. 106–107) used Barthes's semiology to uncover hidden ideological messages in sociocultural symbols, emphasizing the opposing messages from less privileged groups. Additionally, Demeterio (2013, pp. 21–25) examined 13 politically and socially relevant songs by Aristotle Pollisco (a.k.a. Gloc-9), revealing some hidden contradictions due to insufficient ideological criticism.

Summarily, while the existing studies on BNS's fiction have primarily used qualitative approaches to explore themes of alienation, nostalgia, and racial discrimination, providing insights into Filipino immigrant experiences in the U.S., there is a noticeable gap in applying Barthes's semiotic theory to Santos's fiction. While Barthesian semiology has been extensively used in Western literary texts, such as poems and short stories, and in Philippine films and popular culture, its potential application to Filipino diasporic literature remains unexplored. Therefore, this study extends Barthes's semiotic theories to interpret the cultural, historical, and political symbols found in Philippine literature, specifically focusing on BNS's short stories of exile in Filipino diasporic literature.

It is argued that applying Barthesian semiology could lead to a deeper understanding of Santos's use of symbols and cultural codes to convey themes of identity, displacement, and cultural negotiation within his narratives. Such an approach could enhance Santos's works' interpretations by revealing layers of meaning that traditional literary criticism might overlook. Therefore, the gap in literature lies in the need to explore semiotics as a methodological tool to offer new perspectives and deeper insights into BNS's literary contributions to Philippine literature.

This study conducts a two-level semiotic analysis of four short stories by Bienvenido N. Santos (BNS) to explore the ideological meanings behind the Filipino-American exilic experiences. It examines recurring sub-themes of exile through the texts' intrinsic elements like characters, settings, dialogues, imagery, and figures of speech. The first level focuses on the signifier-signified relationship, while the second deciphers the myths embedded in the stories by analyzing how exile and its sub-themes are represented. This study thus asks the following key research questions:

1. What sub-themes of exile occur and recur in BNS's short stories?
2. How are the sub-themes of the experiences of exile demonstrated according to the first level of semiotic analysis?
3. What myths are revealed about the experiences of exile?
4. How are the American Dreams depicted in the short stories after unveiling the myths?

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In Barthes's *Mythologies*, particularly in the second part titled "Myth Today" (pp. 106-164), he extensively discusses the concepts of myths and their functions (Barthes, 1972, pp. 109-138). Barthes (1972, p. 113) characterizes myth as "a second-order semiological system," where signs

from the first system become mere signifiers in the second. He explores how myths conceal ideological and cultural constructs, presenting them as inherent and natural aspects of reality. Since this study aims to explore the myth's role within its larger ideological framework, it addresses how the myths operate within the social and historical contexts in landmark short stories. According to Barthes (1972, p. 42): "Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal. Now, this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology." In this way, bourgeois ideology employs myths to reinforce and legitimize power dynamics, framing them as natural and unchangeable instead of products of historical and social processes.

This literary semiotics study employs two levels of semiotic analysis to reveal the Filipino-American exilic experiences in four selected short stories by Bienvenido Santos. The first level of semiotic analysis identifies and discusses the signs, including signifiers and signified, focusing on connotative meanings related to exile. The second level of analysis unpacks the connotative meanings to uncover myths about the exilic experiences depicted in the stories. At this mythological level, the second-order semiological system treats the sign in the first order as the signifier on a deeper level of signification (Barthes, 1972, p. 113). At the myth level, the sign shows varied concepts representing contemporary worldviews, such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, and objectivism, among others. By deciphering the myths, the literary analysis exposes the ideological functions and identifies the advantaged and disadvantaged groups they represent. The analysis was done at the sentence level based on the short stories' internal elements, such as characters and characterization, images, dialogues, settings, and figures of speech.

This literary semiotics study analyzes four short stories from Bienvenido Santos's anthology *Scent of Apples*, which features his works from 1940 to 1970. Published by the University of Washington Press in 1979 and republished in 2016, the collection won the 1980 American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation. The selected stories are: "Scent of Apples" (Santos, 1955), "The Day the Dancers Came" (1967), "Immigration Blues" (1977), and "Lonely in Autumn Evening" (1955). These texts were chosen for their thematic focus on the Filipino-American diasporic experiences of exile. While myths can often be deciphered in popular culture icons, this study restricts myth recognition to the selected texts.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

CRITICS' REVIEWS OF BNS'S SHORT STORIES UNDER STUDY

Bienvenido N. Santos's stories, a subject of extensive study by critics, are rich with the exilic theme of the experiences of Filipino immigrants in America. These exilic experiences are embedded in the stories' symbols, settings, and character portrayals to engage readers in these diasporic narratives. Perez (2019) posited that a Filipino immigrant writer has the ethical diasporic consciousness that serves as the basis of his/her writing, that's why: "Filipino American authors will never be freed from the summons and responsibility of looking back to their mother country and blissfully settling in America" (pp. 436–437).

Critics have paid particular attention to central symbols in BNS's stories. According to Noipan (2013, pp. 110-111), the title "Scent of Apples" recognizes the apple's significance in the United States and the Philippines. In the U.S., the apple is associated with New York, also known as the "Big Apple." In the Philippines, it symbolizes the letter A of the alphabet, suggesting a

subconscious connection to America's influence on education. As a non-native fruit in the Philippines, the apple's unfamiliar scent evokes alienation, reinforcing the themes of exile, nostalgia, and longing for home. Likewise, Noipan (2013) notes that the story's setting, Fabia's isolated house and farm, further symbolizes his isolation and alienation, highlighting his exilic experiences (pp. 108-109).

Another example is Bernad's (1968 pp. 798-802) review of "The Day the Dancers Came," in which he criticized the portrayal of Fil's excitement for snow in the story, arguing that it inconsistently reflects his age and life experiences. According to Bernad (1968), Fil's concept of snow is that of a boy or a young man, but he is "fifty years old, who has served in the U. S. Army and has become an American citizen and has drifted through many jobs." (p. 802). Snow is not a new phenomenon for Fil, yet his reaction is portrayed as that of a young man. According to Bernad (1968, p. 802), it is reasonable for BNS to portray Fil as an eager boy excited by snow, as it would bring joy to the visiting Filipino dancers who are seeing it for the first time. However, Bernad (1968, p. 802) contends that Fil's excitement should align with his age rather than a teenager's.

Other critics have focused on how feelings of exile and displacement are reflected in the stories. For instance, according to González (2017, p. 39), "Immigration Blues" portrays "the nomadic nature of Filipino-American social reality conveyed through a literature imbued with a peculiarly Filipino exilic sensibility." For Balgoa and Lim (2016, p. 89), textual analysis of third space and identity negotiation themes reveals the differences in the characters' migration experiences. Wulandari (2011, p. 8) talks of how the story depicts the immigration predicaments of "hyphenated Americans," such as Monica, Seniang, and Antonieta, who go to the U.S. hoping for a good and successful life.

The theme of exile recurs as a focal point in these critics' reviews of Santos's short stories and the powerful use of symbols to express this theme. However, much may still be explored about the complex immigrant experiences and the struggles of Filipino characters as they grapple with identity, displacement, and the pursuit of their American Dream.

BACKGROUND OF EACH STORY AND FIRST-LEVEL SEMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Espiritu (2005) recognizes BNS's contribution to understanding Filipino identity in a transnational context based on his negotiated role as author, intellectual, historian, and activist in the face of colonialism, migration, and national struggles. This can be seen in the four stories that this study analyzes.

The short story "Scent of Apples" first appeared in 1955 in the *You Lovely People* collection of BNS's stories and won the Philippine Free Press's 1966 annual short story contest. It narrates a Filipino old-timer, Celestino Fabia's diasporic experiences, emphasizing his longing for Filipino companionship after many years of absence by attending the narrator's lecture. This is signified based on Fabia and the narrator's conversation: "You came all that way on a night like this just to hear me talk?" I asked. "I've seen no Filipinos for so many years now," he answered quickly (Santos, 1955, p. 21). Another symbol of Fabia's eagerness for social interaction with a fellow Filipino is when he invites Ben, the narrator (presumably Santos) to his home. The next day, when they meet again, he appears rejuvenated: "He looked younger..., he was cleanly shaven...He was grinning as we met" (Santos, 1955, p.24).

Nature seems to favour their meeting, offering mild weather that reflects the sincerity of Fabia's invitation and the narrator's acceptance: "There was a mild, ineffectual sun shining; and it was not too cold" (Santos, 1955, p.24). Likewise, the natural imagery represents Fabia's emotional connection to his past. These images evoke Fabia's sad memories of his family and home.

Contextually, the wilted bud mirrors Fabia's expulsion from his childhood home, a consequence of breaking his parents' hearts. Despite this painful memory, Fabia fondly remembers his father's strong hands that once embraced him, even though they were also the hands that pushed him away:

Leafy plants grew on the sides, buds pointing downwards, wilted, and died before they could become flowers. As they fell on the floor, father bent to pick them and throw them out into the corral streets. His hands were strong. I have kissed those hands, many times, many times.

(Santos, 1955, p.26)

While travelling, the narrator listens attentively to Fabia's poignant recollections, which reveal a sense of regret as he reflects on his lost youth and his family's estrangement. The closed gate, symbolizing his family's emotional barrier and reluctance to reconcile, intensifies Fabia's sorrow over the irrecoverable years of his youth:

I grew up there as a pampered brat. I was mean. One day I broke their hearts. I saw Mother cry wordlessly as Father heaped his curses upon me and drove me out of the house, the gate closing heavily after me. And my brothers and sisters took up my father's hate for me and multiplied it numberless times in their own broken hearts. I was no good .

(Santos, 1955, p.26)

Upon reaching Fabia's abode, the narrator notices Fabia's shanty-like dwelling, barely standing with rotting walls and a low floor: "all but ready to crumble in a heap on the ground; its plastered walls were rotting away, the floor was hardly a foot from the ground" (Santos, 1955, p.26). In the dilapidated house, "the room was bare except for a few ancient pieces of second-hand furniture. In the middle of the room stood a stove to keep the family warm in winter. The walls were bare" (Santos, 1955, pp. 26-27). Fabia shows the narrator a backroom filled halfway with apples, which he struggles to sell profitably due to low prices. This struggle reflects Marx's concept of alienation in a capitalist system, where workers like Fabia are disadvantaged. Despite owning an apple farm, he feels distanced from his home while engaged in menial work. The narrator, with a sense of empathy, says, "In apple blossom time, it must be lovely here, I thought. But what about wintertime?" (Santos, 1955, p. 27), speculating on larger environmental and social pressures faced by Fabia and other migrant workers.

As the narrator bids farewell to Fabia, he expresses his desire to visit Fabia's hometown. However, Fabia responds with resignation, saying that he no longer fears being forgotten by his family. When Fabia expresses his belief that no one will remember him, his words resonate with a mix of defeat and courage. The car rolling away and hands waving goodbye symbolize Fabia's acceptance that he has no family left to return to in the Philippines: "Thanks a lot. But, you see, nobody would remember me now." (Santos, 1955, p.29).

Autumn marks a significant transformation in Fabia's life. Its glorious features, "The trees are getting ready to die, and they show their colours, proud-like" (Santos, 1955, p.25), signify his shift from being solely Filipino to navigating the complexities of being Filipino-American. This new identity brings both a sense of displacement and a conflicting mix of emotions. Living in a new culture fosters a deep sense of exile, intensifying feelings of loneliness and isolation within him, as captured in this passage:

How many times did the lonely mind take unpleasant detours away from the familiar winding lanes towards home for fear of this, the remembered hurt, the long-lost youth, the grim shadows of the years; how many times indeed, only the exile knows.

(Santos, 1955, p.25)

In this semiotic analysis level, the signifier and the signified form the sign. Vivid descriptions of the rough roads and dry surroundings leading to Fabia's home, "...narrow lanes, barren land overgrown with weeds, dead leaves and dry earth" (Santos, 1955, p. 26), the rundown house and along with Ruth's "shapeless waist, rough hands, coarse and red with labour" (Santos, 1955, p. 26) signify the harsh poverty experienced by Fabia's family in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. The pleasant weather symbolizes the narrator's sincere acceptance of Fabia's invitation, while their conversations capture Fabia's intense longing for connection and craving for cultural companionship.

Many other images are used for various negative feelings: The "wilted bud" that dies before it becomes a flower signifies the main character's unhappy memories of leaving his hometown, while the gate closing heavily signifies the gravity of rejection of and separation from Fabia's family. Fabia's nostalgia is captured in this excerpt when he recollects his happy memories with this family in an old Visayan town:

But sometimes, you know, I miss that house, the roosting chickens on the low-topped walls. I miss my brothers and sisters. Mother sitting in her chair, looking like a pale ghost in the corner of the room, I would remember the great live posts, massive tree trunks from the forests.

(Santos, 1955, p. 26)

Essentially, the familiar scent of apples in Fabia's house metaphorically represents the nostalgia of Ben and Fabia's meeting. For Ben, this fragrance confronts him with the yearning for home's familiar smells and sights. For Fabia, though necessary, farming apples symbolizes his bittersweet journey as an immigrant navigating a new livelihood where he engages in a menial job. Thus, in the short story, the signs, the links between the signifiers and the signified, reinforce themes of poverty, longing, alienation, and nostalgia, capturing Fabia's exilic experiences as a Filipino-American in the first wave of Filipino immigrants to the U.S.

The second story, "The Day the Dancers Came," first appeared in 1967 and is also one of BNS's most anthologized texts and a winner of the *Philippine Free Press* annual short story contest. In the story, Fil, the main character, eagerly hopes to meet the Filipino dancers in Chicago and make them feel welcome despite his friend Tony's opposition.

The snow in the story signifies Fil's eagerness and excitement to meet fellow Filipinos and his eventual sadness at their rejection. The story begins with Fil's anticipation by exclaiming, "Snow! It's snowing!" (Santos, 1967, p. 113), waking his friend Tony, who finds his excitement irritating, calling it "acting too eager" (Santos, 1967, p. 114). Fil muses that Filipinos visiting Chicago for the first time would love experiencing snow, heightening his enthusiasm to be their host. Feeling like a child, he wipes the snow off his car, "light and young... and licks the flakes, cold and tasteless" (Santos, 1979, p. 119). However, in the climax, the melting snow signifies Fil's rejection by the young Filipino dancers who ignore him: "The snow had stopped falling; it was melting fast in the sun and turning into slush" (Santos, 1967, p.121). The snow in the story's major parts shows the interlink between the signifier and the signified at the connotative level of meaning. The snow symbol is used to reinforce Fil's deep yearning to connect with fellow Filipinos, but as it turns into a slush, it signifies his disillusionment and the fading of his hopes to welcome them.

Another focal point is the metaphor of a bomb that Fil and Tony discuss when they talk about the certainty of death and the topic of being forgotten. Tony sarcastically says that if a bomb were to be dropped in Chicago, only the dancers might be spared. While a bomb connotes danger and death, Fil's deep yearning to meet the dancers leads him to believe they will be safe: "The bombs won't be falling on this night" (Santos, 1967, p.116). When the two talk of the bomb falling in the Philippines, Tony retorts: "What's that to you? You got no more folks ove' der, right? I know

it's nothing to me. I'll be dead before that" (Santos, 1955, p.116). Fil's sadness over being forgotten lingers as he imagines the dancers remembering his kindness: "We met a kind, old man... who took us to his apartment" (Santos, 1967, p. 124).

Another metaphor is used to depict Fil's diasporic experience, this time, of lost youth through the metaphor of time as a villain: "For Fil, time was the villain... too young became too old, too late" (Santos, 1979, p. 116). He feels old and homesick as he hears the dancers uttering familiar dialects that evoke memories of "playtime, long shadows of evening on the plaza, barrio fiestas, misa de gallo" (Santos, 1967, p. 120) and "fragrance long-forgotten... of camia, ilang-ilang, and dama de noche (Santos, 1967, p. 121).

When the dancers leave without acknowledging him, Fil feels alone and dejected: "There was no one there except his reflection in the glass door, a double exposure of himself and a giant plant with its thorny branches around him like arms in a loving embrace" (Santos, 1967, p.122). The giant plant may connote America's painful embrace of Fil as an alienated immigrant, with the thorny branches signifying his struggles pursuing the American Dream. The disillusioned Fil finally perceives that he is an outsider and disconnected from the crowd of fellow Filipinos who are hostile to him despite his pure intentions. He feels socially alienated: "I didn't exist. Or worse, I was unclean. Basura. Garbage. They were ashamed of me. How could I be Filipino?" (Santos, 1967, p.124). The images of "mud on the pavement" and of the sun throwing "shadows at their feet" (Santos, 1967, p.121) signify his disillusionment and acceptance that his hospitality is unwanted.

Thus, at the connotative level, signs, the interlink between the signifiers and the signified in the short story "The Day the Dancers Came", is successfully unpacked through the story's elements, such as images and metaphors, to signify Filemon Acayan's diasporic experiences of exile, which include a deep yearning to meet the Filipino dancers, his nostalgia/ homesickness, alienation, and his regrets over losing his youth.

"Immigration Blues," the third BNS short story analyzed here, first appeared in 1977 and was recognized by Yamamoto (cited in Noipan, 2013) as one of Ted Solotaroff's 100 most distinguished short stories of that year. The story explores the experiences of first-generation Filipinos in America, focusing on Alipio Palma, a U.S. citizen living alone in San Francisco. After losing his wife and then suffering a car accident that left him bedridden for a year, Alipio receives a visit from Antonieta Zafra, whose husband Carlito is an old friend from the Philippines. Antonieta, married to a U.S. citizen to avoid deportation, introduces her sister Monica to Alipio for potential marriage. Monica, a teacher in the Philippines, goes to San Francisco on a tourist visa and will be deported in two days.

The women's gestures and conversations are orchestrated to entice Alipio into marrying Monica. When Antonieta and Monica gently knock on Alipio's door, their soft knock signifies that they seek a favour. Although Alipio is confused about who is at the door, he finds the sound pleasant and feels excited at the unexpected visit. Alipio's confusion about the distinct knock signifies his eagerness to connect with fellow Filipinos.

The descriptions of Alipio's house are symbolic. Upon the two women's arrival, he notes his messy room: "A TV set is crowded with an assortment of chairs and tables. An aquarium crowded the mantelpiece of a fake fireplace. The carpet underneath was sodden black. Old magazines and tabloids lay just about everywhere" (Santos, 1979, p.5). Additionally, there is "a huge rectangular table with a vase of plastic flowers as centrepiece" (Santos, 1977, p.10). The cluttered room and the big empty table signify Alipio's solitary life and need for a partner.

Monica's conversation with Alipio reinforces their connection. First, she compliments his strength of character and belief in God, then points out the large table in the room, insinuating that he needs someone to share meals with by asking: "Don't you find it too big sometimes?" (Santos 1977, p.17). However, Alipio responds that he prefers eating in the kitchen, prompting Monica to emphasize the emptiness of the dining table and impose upon Alipio the urgency of having a partner.

The story's last paragraph shows that Alipio eventually accepts Monica as his wife. At this moment in the story, Alipio realizes God's mercy on him in the form of a new young wife, Monica. Likewise, the excerpt is rich in symbolism to signify the characters' new roles as a couple. Monica's familiarity with the kitchen reflects her role as Alipio's wife, with Alipio, her husband, guiding her. Alipio's disorientation signifies a loss of direction for men his age. With Monica by his side, his life will change as she helps him navigate the uncertainties of ageing:

"God dictates," he said. His eyes were on his legs, in the direction she was taking. She knew where the kitchen was, of course. He just wanted to be sure she won't lose her way. Like him. On his way to the kitchen, sometimes, he found himself in the bedroom. Lotsa things happened to men his age.

(Santos, 1977, p. 20)

In the story, Alipio experiences nostalgia for his lost life in the Philippines. The auditory sensory image enhances his sense of longing as a Filipino. The sound of the breakers gives Alipio a feeling of home, as he connects it to the waves of the Pacific Ocean that he sees at night in his dreams: "... across the ocean is the Philippines, we're not far from home" (Santos, 1977, p. 7).

Based on the story's semiotic analysis as revealed by the signs and the reviewed studies earlier discussed, BNS's short story "Immigration Blues" exemplifies the broader narrative of Filipino immigrants facing the emotional and practical challenges of complex living between two worlds-their homeland (the Philippines) and their new environment (the U.S).

"Lonely in the Autumn Evening," from BNS's 1955 collection *You Lovely People*, narrates the tragic story of Nanoy, a Filipino who came to America to study, married an American woman who left him, and lived in miserable conditions: "the walls were untidy and cracked. Insects crawled all over the place. It reeked with the smell of urine and human waste" (Santos, 1955, p. 84). Nanoy worked menial jobs to support his son, Junior, who died in a hospital for orphan children. The omniscient narrator, Ambo, describes Nanoy as a lost child in a foreign country, recalling his youthful appearance with "rosy cheeks, a mane of dark wavy hair, and with dimples" (Santos, 1955, p. 83) and lamenting how he ends up in a "vermin-infested room in the coloured section near the wharf by the Potac..." (Santos, 1955, p. 83).

As a sub-theme of exile, the fear of being forgotten is illustrated in several instances in the story through the imagery of a picture and the characters' conversations. The picture symbolizes memory, eventually fading, signifying that a Filipino who leaves his family for a better life in the U.S. will be forgotten. The blurred image reflects the fear of being forgotten: "... a blurred face in a picture fast yellowing with the years; then completely unrecognizable in some family album, or on a wall among a hundred other faces" (Santos, 1955, pp. 82-83). The death of the picture signifies Nanoy's loss of Junior, whose memory ended with his death: "The day he died, there was a changed expression on the boy's face. He died also on his picture. I knew it. I knew it" (Santos, 1955, p. 85). Ambo, worried about being forgotten, asks Ben: "How would they know out there of our passing? Would we come to them in a dream, speak to them out of a cloud, and tell them goodbye, we have just passed away?" (Santos, 1979, p.83). Ambo appeases himself when he says:

“It is better that nobody remembers. It is better that nobody knows” (Santos, 1955, p.83). He says those words reflecting on Nanoy’s lonely death in the U.S.

The setting and imagery in the story underscore themes of isolation and despair, reflecting Nanoy's miserable life in America and the narrator's feelings of exile. The story’s setting, a severe winter around Christmas when Nanoy begs fellow Filipinos for help with his son Junior in a sanitarium, emphasizes his sadness at their cold response during a season meant for love and compassion. The word “lonely” in the title extends beyond mere description, encapsulating the profound isolation surrounding Nanoy’s final resting place. This loneliness is further emphasized through vivid imagery, such as the wind and mud symbolizing grave desolation. For example, during Nanoy’s burial, the wind that naturally blows suddenly shifts when the mourners prepare to leave: “a dark smoke floated above the dying trees in the graveyard wind-borne from a dozen chimneys of a sprawling ammunitions factory” (p.85). Adding to this grimness, the narrator notices the mud clinging to his shoes, “reddish brown and soft, like earth on a hillock after the rain” (Santos, 1955, p.85), prompting memories of the: “muddy fields among the Sinicaran hills in Albay, along the muddy trails in June” (p.85). This mud symbolizes both the beginning of life and, in the context of Nanoy’s burial, signifies an ending. Furthermore, the narrator’s recollection of the mud in his native land when he looks at the mud in a foreign land leads him to conclude that wherever a person is, death is inevitable, and regardless of where one is buried, they will soon be forgotten.

In this story, the images of a grave, wind, and mud signify death in America. The grave symbolizes finality, the wind represents turmoil, and the mud signifies difficulty or being stuck, collectively illustrating Nanoy's downfall during his stay in the U.S. The imagery in the title, “Lonely in the Autumn Evening,” evokes the narrator’s sense of loss against a backdrop of an autumn evening, a season of reflection. The story vividly depicts the end of life alongside the passage of time, reflecting the narrator's intense feelings of grief and contemplation. Nanoy's grave, described as “standing lonely in the autumn evening” (Santos, 1955, p. 85), conveys the season's stillness and melancholy, while the fading light of autumn evening enhances the sense of isolation and loss.

BNS's stories analyzed in this study employ signs, symbols, and imagery to capture Filipino immigrants' complex emotional and psychological experiences in America. These narratives reflect the exilic experiences of nostalgia, isolation, and disillusionment, highlighting contrasting perspectives on the American Dream—from hope and opportunity to despair and loss. In "Scent of Apples" and "The Day the Dancers Came," themes of poverty, homesickness, and fear of being forgotten illustrate the immigrant experiences in the U.S., revealing how the pursuit of the American Dream can cause disconnection from families and fellow Filipinos. At the same time, both stories emphasize nostalgia and regret; "Immigration Blues" and "Lonely in the Autumn Evening" offer differing views of the American Dream. "Immigration Blues" explores the pursuit of a better life through convenience marriages, while "Lonely in the Autumn Evening" presents a sombre perspective in America, characterized by death and loneliness. Contrary to the belief that America is the "land of milk and honey," these stories reveal the complexities of immigrant life while still expressing gratitude for the opportunities the country provides.

SECOND-ORDER SEMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The exilic experiences serve as a natural justification for pursuing the American Dream, with myths framing historical contexts and social structures as inevitable aspects of the natural order. At the level of mythical analysis, this paper identifies six recurring sub-themes in BNS’s short

stories that reinforce the theme of exile: (1) longing for the company of fellow Filipinos, (2) a sense of nostalgia, (3) alienation/disillusionment, (4) poverty, misery, rejection, and loneliness, (5) regrets over long-lost youth, and (6) fears of being forgotten. Additionally, social realities, such as marriages of convenience, highlight Filipinos' exilic experiences in their quest for the American Dream. This dream relates to exilic Filipinos' desire to overcome every insurmountable circumstance, be it psychological or economic, and their belief that a good life can only be found in the U.S. and that America is, in fact, almost heaven. In pursuit of this dream, Filipinos face racial discrimination, the stigma of failure (when they do not achieve their dreams), and the fear of disappointing their families in the Philippines. The hurt characters portrayed in BNS' short stories are the willing victims who endure psychological turmoil of alienation and longing, poverty, and misery to sustain their dreams of a good and happy life in America.

The exilic theme is a motif in all the short stories because of the characters' separation from the country, the Philippines, and their homes. The sub-themes in these texts align with some of the earlier literary studies on BNS's works. Bernad's (1968, p. 802) review of BNS's selected prose works noted that the prevailing themes in eight short stories were exile and homelessness of Filipino expatriates in the U.S. He also mentioned that the story "The Day the Dancers Came" is a "story of disillusionment" because its protagonist looks forward to the arrival of the Filipino dancers with great anticipation but then is ignored. In his review of the 1979 BNS's collection titled "Scent of Apples," Galdon (1980 pp. 377-380) highlights Leonard Casper's introduction in the volume that enumerates the themes of BNS's short stories, such as (1) exile and homelessness (2) lost dream, and (3) the Filipina, though this theme is beyond this study's purview. Galdon (1980, p. 378), quoting Casper, mentions "new loneliness," a fear of not belonging to a culture, as a sub-theme of exile and homelessness.

Barthes (1972) asserts that "the naturalization of the concept is an essential function of myth" (p. 130), whereby ideas or concepts become part of reality. In BNS's stories, exilic experiences, such as poverty, nostalgia, longing, alienation, regrets of lost youth, and fears of being forgotten, may be construed as natural for first-generation Filipino immigrants, the "manongs" or the old-timers in the U.S. The sentimental Filipino characters in the short stories under study regarded their exilic experiences as inherent in their struggles to endure the "stigma of failure in a foreign land" (Santos, 1979, p. 12) while striving for a successful life and prove to their families and relatives their migration success stories. Despite the characters' exilic experiences in BNS's analyzed stories, the first-generation Filipino U.S. immigrants continue to accept the American Dream as natural, allowing the ruling class to impose its power, thus transforming culture into nature. This finding connects the mythical schema to broader historical and societal contexts, shifting the analysis from signs (semiology) to underlying ideas and beliefs (ideology) (Barthes, 1972, p. 128).

Since Barthes (1972, pp. 137-141) equates myth-making with bourgeois ideologies, it can be inferred that the characters' exilic experiences in BNS's short stories from the 1950s to the 1970s reflect the dominance of the U.S. ruling class as a hegemonic force imposing its authority. Even as U.S. citizens, Filipinos remain under this ruling class, rendering them second-class or subordinate citizens. In "Scent of Apples," Ruth, a country girl and the wife of Fabia, states, "There's no such thing as first-class Filipino" (p. 24) in response to the narrator's introduction of Fabia as a first-class Filipino. Ruth's assertion challenges the notion that, despite individual achievements or social mobility, Filipinos can attain a "first-class" status in American society, which continues to marginalize certain groups.

CONCLUSION

The first-generation Filipino-Americans in the U.S. remain second-class citizens who experience the psychological turmoil of living in exile, as recounted in their sad stories in America. The painful experiences of Filipinos in America in BNS's short stories may reflect the long-term effect or consequence of the American colonization of the Philippines. This study proves Barthes's (1972 pp. 133-134) claim that "literature is an undoubted mythical system: there is a meaning, there is a signifier, and there is a signified." In literature, the meaning is the message of a literary piece; the signifier is the actual form of the text in words and writing; the signified is the idea or concept the text bears; and the signification is the overall message a literary text conveys. A particular literary piece should communicate its message and contribute to the readers' deeper understanding of what it represents.

The sub-themes identified in BNS's short stories provide significant insights into the exilic experiences of first-generation Filipinos in the U.S. as they overcome identity, belonging, ambition, and sacrifice while pursuing the American Dream. Despite cultural displacement and societal challenges, Filipino characters in the studied short stories often appear to be willing victims, taking pride in achieving American citizenship and its opportunities. These stories also reveal the influence of a hegemonic American system, reflecting the lingering power dynamics of a former colony. The classes or groups that gained something from the myths deciphered from BNS's short stories are the Americans, the ruling class whose influence remains impactful among the Filipinos. Suffice it to say that the disadvantaged groups from the myths and ideologies unveiled from and tucked underneath the short stories are the first wave of Filipino immigrants to the U.S., who, despite marginalization, naturalize the exilic experiences, and still believe in the promise of a better life in America.

Literature, as a powerful tool representing social class, can be an *avant-garde* approach to disrupt the *status quo* and reshape literary experiences. However, while literature aims for social emancipation, it may also promote the hegemony of the powerful classes. This study reveals that BNS's short stories operate within a mythical system, suggesting they should be viewed not as objective reflections of reality but as a semiological system conveying cultural myths that uphold dominant ideologies and power structures (Barthes, 1972, p. 130). Like popular culture artefacts, if not closely read, literature may reinforce the ruling class's ideologies instead of challenging them, thus serving as a tool for colonization rather than contributing to decolonization, which necessitates resisting and dismantling entrenched beliefs and norms of ruling classes.

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