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Daragang Magayon Rewritten: A Feminist and Postcolonial Reading of Merlinda Bobis's Cantata

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Abstract. Philippine legends preserve cultural understandings of gender, identity, and power, yet their contemporary literary retellings offer opportunities to reconsider inherited representations. Although existing scholarship has explored the feminist and postcolonial dimensions of Merlinda Bobis's works, limited attention has been devoted to a sustained comparison of the traditional *Daragang Magayon* legend and Bobis's *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon,* particularly concerning transformations in characterization, narrative voice, and female agency. Addressing this gap, the present study examines how Bobis reimagines the traditional narrative and reconfigures its representations of gender, identity, authority, and resistance. Employing qualitative comparative textual analysis, the study examines the traditional legend compiled by Damiana L. Eugenio alongside Bobis's Cantata, drawing on feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory. Through close reading and thematic analysis, the study investigates changes in characterization, narrative perspective, representations of the female body, relationships to power, and cultural identity. Findings reveal that although Bobis preserves recognizable characters and narrative elements, she substantially transforms their meanings. While the traditional account primarily constructs Magayon through beauty, familial obligation, romantic relationships, and sacrifice, Bobis repositions her as a warrior whose voice, desires, and actions challenge conventional gender expectations. Particularly significant is the emergence of *Magayon's* first-person voice, which establishes her as an active narrative subject rather than merely an object of male desire and conflict. Her reimagined identity also challenges restrictive representations of femininity by associating the female body with strength, agency, and resistance. The study concludes that Bobis's feminist and postcolonial rewriting does not reject the inherited legend but reinterprets its cultural meanings, demonstrating how literary retellings can challenge established representations while creating alternative possibilities for female identity and narrative authority.

Keywords: Literary Rewriting; Feminist Literary Criticism; *Daragang Magayon*; Postcolonial Theory

Introduction

Philippine folk literature constitutes an important repository of cultural memory, reflecting the beliefs, social relationships, values, and collective experiences of communities across generations. Myths and legends, in particular, communicate cultural understandings of identity, authority, gender, and the relationship between people and their environment. As documented in Eugenio's (2002) Philippine Folk Literature: The Legends, these narratives form part of the country's diverse literary traditions and continue to provide meaningful contexts for understanding Philippine cultural experiences. Their significance, however, extends beyond the preservation of inherited stories. As narratives are transmitted, documented, and adapted into different literary forms, their characters and meanings may also be reconsidered in relation to changing cultural and social perspectives. Literary retellings therefore provide opportunities to examine how familiar narratives are preserved, questioned, and reconstructed, particularly when inherited representations of identity and power become subjects of critical reinterpretation.

Among the enduring narratives in Philippine folklore is the legend of *Daragang Magayon*, which is closely associated with the origin of Mayon Volcano in the Bicol Region. In the traditional narrative documented by Eugenio (2002), *Magayon* is principally characterized through her remarkable beauty, her position as the daughter of *Rajah Makusog*, and her romantic relationship with *Panganoron*. The conflict

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emerges when *Pagtuga* pursues *Magayon* and captures her father, compelling her to agree to marriage as a means of securing *Makusog's* release. The ensuing confrontation ultimately results in tragedy, with *Magayon's* death becoming associated with the formation of Mayon Volcano. Although *Magayon* occupies a central position in the narrative, her characterization is closely connected to familial obligation, romantic attachment, and conflicts involving male authority. Her decisions remain consequential to the story, but the circumstances under which she acts are largely shaped by the demands and actions of others. These narrative features raise questions about how female identity, agency, and relationships to power are constructed within the legend. Nevertheless, because the *Daragang Magayon* narrative exists in multiple oral and written versions, the present study considers Eugenio's (2002) compilation as its selected traditional text rather than as a definitive representation of the entire narrative tradition.

The representation of *Magayon* acquires a different dimension in Merlinda Bobis's *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon* (1993). Drawing upon the recognizable characters and narrative circumstances of the traditional legend, Bobis reconstructs *Magayon* as a warrior whose identity extends beyond beauty, daughterhood, romantic relationships, and sacrifice. Her reimagining foregrounds the female protagonist's voice, physical capability, desires, and resistance to the structures that seek to define her identity and choices. Rather than presenting *Magayon* exclusively as the woman whose fate is shaped by conflicts among men, Bobis places her experiences and responses at the center of the narrative. This transformation is significant because it invites a reconsideration of the relationship between femininity and heroism, particularly within literary traditions in which heroic action has frequently been associated with male characters. The adaptation consequently provides an opportunity to examine how literary rewriting can challenge established gender representations while maintaining recognizable connections to an inherited cultural narrative.

Scholarly examinations of Bobis's literary works have established the significance of her writing in challenging restrictive representations of gender, identity, and cultural belonging. Herrero (2006) examines the ethical and identity-related dimensions of *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman, while Herrero (2007) situates Bobis's poem-plays within broader discussions of cultural identity, patriarchal structures, and the reconstruction of marginalized women's voices. These studies recognize the significance of Bobis's engagement with inherited literary conventions and her efforts to challenge established representations of women. Similarly, Naidas (2019), through a postcolonial reading of Bobis's Fish Hair Woman, demonstrates the relevance of characterization, narrative technique, and signification in examining cultural identity and representation within the author's literary production. Together, these investigations provide important critical foundations for understanding Bobis's engagement with gender, cultural identity, and structures of power.

Despite these scholarly contributions, a more focused comparative examination of the selected traditional *Daragang Magayon* narrative and Bobis's literary reimagining remains warranted. Although Herrero's (2006, 2007) studies establish the significance of *Cantata* in reconstructing female identity and challenging conventional heroic representations, their central concerns differ from a systematic comparison of the particular narrative features through which *Magayon* is represented in Eugenio's (2002) documented legend and Bobis's (1993) adaptation. Specifically, the relationship between changes in characterization, narrative voice, female agency, bodily representation, and structures of power requires further examination as an interconnected process of literary transformation. Such an approach is important because identifying the feminist significance of Bobis's reimagining does not, by itself, fully explain how particular elements of the selected traditional narrative are retained, altered, or assigned new meanings. A direct comparative analysis therefore offers a more precise understanding of the textual processes through which *Magayon's* identity and narrative position are reconstructed. This specific comparative concern constitutes the analytical gap addressed by the present study.

Accordingly, this study examines how *Daragang Magayon* is represented in the selected traditional legend compiled by Eugenio (2002) and in Bobis's *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon* (1993). Specifically, it seeks to answer three questions: (1) How is *Daragang Magayon* represented in the traditional legend and in Bobis's reimagining? (2) How do the two narratives construct female agency, voice, identity, and relationships to power? and (3) How does Bobis's reworking function as a feminist and postcolonial counter-narrative through its transformation of the inherited myth? Employing qualitative comparative textual analysis, the study examines the continuities and departures between the two texts through close reading and thematic analysis. Feminist literary criticism provides a framework for examining representations of female identity, agency, embodiment, and patriarchal authority, while postcolonial theory informs the examination of cultural representation, naming, narrative authority, and the reinterpretation of inherited cultural forms.

The study argues that Bobis's reimagining does more than transform *Daragang Magayon* from a beautiful maiden into a warrior woman. More significantly, it reconfigures the narrative conditions through which her identity, experiences, and relationships to power are represented. By foregrounding *Magayon's*

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voice and capacity for self-definition, the adaptation challenges restrictive constructions of femininity while preserving recognizable elements of the traditional narrative. The postcolonial dimension of this transformation is examined not through an assumption that the original legend is inherently colonial, but through the ways Bobis reworks an inherited cultural narrative to reconsider established forms of representation and authority. By bringing feminist and postcolonial perspectives into a sustained comparison of the two selected texts, the present study contributes to the understanding of Philippine literary retelling as a process through which cultural narratives can be preserved while their meanings are critically reinterpreted.

Literature Review

Philippine Folklore and the Reinterpretation of Cultural Narratives

Philippine folk literature constitutes an important body of cultural narratives through which communities communicate their histories, beliefs, identities, and social values. Eugenio (2002), in Philippine Folk Literature: The Legends, documents legends from different regions of the Philippines, demonstrating the diversity of narratives associated with historical figures, supernatural experiences, geographical formations, and cultural traditions. Such collections contribute to the preservation of narratives that have circulated through oral transmission while also providing written versions for literary examination. However, the existence of multiple versions of a legend suggests that cultural narratives cannot be understood as entirely fixed or uniform representations of collective experience. Their meanings remain subject to reinterpretation as they circulate across generations and literary forms.

Studies of Philippine folklore have further demonstrated how traditional narratives acquire new meanings through cultural transmission and adaptation. Seki (2001), in examining the legend-making processes surrounding *Maria Cacao* in the Visayan context, draws attention to the importance of examining legends within their particular cultural settings. Similarly, Reyes (2009) investigates the relationship between Philippine *komiks* and folk traditions, demonstrating how writers reinterpret inherited narratives, particularly those involving heroes and heroines, within popular literary forms. These studies establish that the continued circulation of folklore involves more than the preservation of familiar characters and events; it also creates opportunities for cultural narratives to acquire meanings shaped by their changing contexts of production and reception.

More recently, Regadio (2024) examined the contemporary circulation of the Mount Mayon myth through social media representations of the volcano's 2018 eruption. Through discourse analysis of a viral photograph, memes, and online interactions, the study explored how digital representations encouraged renewed circulation of the narrative involving *Daragang Magayon* and *Panganoron*. Although the findings demonstrated the capacity of digital platforms to revive public attention to cultural myths, Regadio also identified the limitations of online engagement, particularly its tendency to privilege romantic nostalgia and entertainment over deeper cultural understanding. This investigation illustrates the continuing relevance of the *Daragang Magayon* narrative while demonstrating that contemporary reinterpretations may emphasize particular cultural meanings over others.

Collectively, these studies position Philippine folklore as a continuing site of cultural production and reinterpretation. Nevertheless, their principal concerns lie in folklore documentation, cultural transmission, and adaptation across different media. They offer important contexts for understanding the circulation of traditional narratives but do not specifically explain how the gendered characterization of *Daragang Magayon* changes when a selected traditional version is examined alongside Bobis's literary reimagining.

Feminist Literary Rewriting and the Reconstruction of Female Identity

Feminist literary scholarship has consistently questioned the ways inherited narratives construct femininity, distribute authority, and establish the conditions through which women are represented. Gilbert and Gubar (1979), in The Madwoman in the Attic, examine the restrictive representations of women in literary traditions and the ways women writers negotiate and challenge established constructions of femininity. Their scholarship provides an important foundation for considering how literary representations may position women within categories that limit their identities, experiences, and narrative possibilities.

Rich (1972) similarly conceptualizes literary re-vision as a critical practice through which women reconsider inherited literary representations from alternative perspectives. Her argument emphasizes the significance of returning to established narratives to question the assumptions governing female identity and experience. Such a perspective is particularly relevant to contemporary literary retellings because it locates the significance of rewriting not merely in the production of a different story but also in the reconsideration of whose experiences and perspectives have previously been privileged.

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Extending this discussion, Ostriker (1982) introduces the concept of revisionist myth-making to examine how women poets transform inherited myths and challenge the gendered meanings associated with traditional representations. Rather than abandoning recognizable mythological figures, revisionist writing can reconstruct their identities and experiences by altering the perspectives through which their stories are presented. This approach provides a relevant critical foundation for examining how female figures traditionally associated with beauty, sacrifice, or romantic relationships may be reconstructed through alternative representations of voice, desire, power, and agency.

These feminist perspectives converge in recognizing literary rewriting as a means of questioning established representations of women. However, they approach this process through different emphases: Gilbert and Gubar (1979) foreground the gendered conventions of literary representation, Rich (1972) emphasizes the critical possibilities of re-vision, and Ostriker (1982) examines the transformation of inherited mythology. Their combined insights are relevant to the present study because the reinterpretation of Daragang Magayon involves not only changes in characterization but also a reconsideration of how female identity and narrative authority are constructed. These theoretical contributions must nevertheless be examined in relation to the specific cultural and textual circumstances of Bobis's work rather than assumed to operate identically across different literary traditions.

Postcolonial Rewriting, Cultural Identity, and Narrative Authority

Postcolonial literary scholarship provides another perspective for understanding how inherited narratives and literary forms may be reconsidered in relation to cultural identity, representation, and authority. Ashcroft et al. (2002) discuss how postcolonial writing challenges dominant literary and cultural conventions while developing alternative forms of expression. Their framework foregrounds the significance of literary production in negotiating cultural authority and the continuing effects of colonial histories. Within this perspective, the reinterpretation of cultural narratives may be examined through the ways texts negotiate inherited forms, cultural identities, and structures of representation.

McClintock (1993) further complicates the relationship between gender and cultural identity by demonstrating how nationalist narratives often employ gendered representations of familial relationships and social belonging. Her analysis is relevant to literary narratives in which women are associated with familial obligation, cultural symbolism, and collective identity. It suggests that the representation of women within cultural narratives cannot always be separated from broader structures of authority and belonging. However, such insights should not be interpreted as evidence that every traditional narrative necessarily reproduces colonial or nationalist ideology. Rather, they provide a basis for examining the relationship between gendered representation and cultural authority where these concerns become visible within the text.

Hutcheon (2013), in A Theory of Adaptation, provides a complementary perspective by conceptualizing adaptation as both a creative process and a product of reinterpretation. Adaptations retain recognizable relationships with earlier works while introducing transformations shaped by new contexts, intentions, and modes of expression. This understanding is particularly useful in examining Bobis's *Cantata* because it recognizes literary adaptation as a form of creative engagement rather than merely a reproduction or replacement of an earlier narrative.

Together, these perspectives provide a basis for examining the intersection of cultural representation and literary rewriting. Feminist criticism foregrounds the gendered construction of *Magayon's* identity, while postcolonial criticism directs attention to questions of cultural authority, historical context, and representation. Adaptation theory further explains how an inherited narrative can remain recognizable while acquiring different meanings. The intersection of these perspectives allows the present study to examine Bobis's reimagining without presuming that the traditional *Daragang Magayon* legend is inherently colonial or that its transformation necessarily requires a rejection of cultural tradition.

Previous Scholarship on Merlinda Bobis's Literary Works

Existing scholarship on Merlinda Bobis has established the significance of her writing in relation to gender, identity, cultural negotiation, and resistance. Herrero (2006), in Merlinda Bobis's Re-evaluation of Ethics and Identity: "*Cantata* of the Warrior Woman," directly examines the ethical and identity-related concerns of Bobis's reworking. The study is particularly relevant because it recognizes the political and gendered significance of the female warrior within Bobis's literary reconstruction. It consequently establishes an important critical precedent for understanding *Cantata* as a work concerned with more than the reproduction of an inherited myth.

Herrero (2007) further examines Bobis's poem-plays, particularly Promenade and *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman, within the broader contexts of ethics, identity, Filipino literary traditions, and cross-cultural representation. The study emphasizes the reconstruction of marginalized women's voices and the challenge posed by Bobis's writing to rigid classifications involving gender, nationality, ethnicity, and culture. In discussing Cantata, Herrero also considers Bobis's transformation of epic conventions and her use of

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performative traditions to challenge the marginalization of women within heroic narratives. These observations demonstrate that the feminist intervention in Bobis's reimagining has already received significant scholarly attention.

Meanwhile, Naidas (2019) offers a postcolonial examination of Bobis's novel Fish Hair Woman, focusing on characterization, narrative technique, and signification. The study demonstrates the relevance of postcolonial criticism in interpreting Bobis's representations of identity and experience. Although Naidas examines a different literary work, the study provides a related perspective on how Bobis's narrative strategies may be interpreted through postcolonial literary frameworks.

Considered together, these studies demonstrate that Bobis's writing has already been examined through feminist, ethical, and postcolonial perspectives. Herrero's studies provide direct critical engagement with Cantata, particularly its reconstruction of women's experiences and its challenge to traditional heroic conventions, while Naidas extends the discussion of postcolonial representation to another work by Bobis. Nevertheless, their approaches differ from the specific comparative orientation of the present investigation. Herrero (2006, 2007) foregrounds the ethical, cultural, gendered, and performative dimensions of Bobis's writing, whereas Naidas (2019) focuses on the postcolonial construction of meaning in Fish Hair Woman. These studies provide essential foundations for the present analysis without fully addressing its selected comparative corpus and corresponding analytical categories.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis to examine the representation of Daragang Magayon in a selected traditional version of the legend and Merlinda Bobis's Cantata of the Warrior Woman Daragang Magayon. The research is interpretive in orientation, focusing on how literary language, characterization, narrative perspective, and symbolic representations construct meanings concerning female identity, agency, power, and resistance. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the investigation seeks to understand the meanings produced within literary narratives rather than measure the frequency of particular linguistic or narrative features. As Creswell (2013) explains, qualitative inquiry emphasizes the interpretation of meanings within particular contexts, making it relevant to the examination of literary representations and their ideological implications. The comparative design enables the study to identify continuities, departures, and transformations between the selected traditional narrative and Bobis's literary reimagining. Rather than treating the two works as interchangeable versions of the same text, the analysis considers their distinct narrative forms and representational strategies. Particular attention is given to how Magayon is characterized, whose perspectives are foregrounded, how her actions and decisions are presented, and how relationships involving gender and authority influence her position within each narrative. The comparison consequently examines both what remains recognizable in Bobis's adaptation and what acquires new significance through literary rewriting. The study integrates close reading with thematic analysis. Close reading provides the primary means of examining characterization, dialogue, narrative voice, imagery, symbolism, and the contextual significance of selected textual passages. Thematic analysis, informed by Braun and Clarke (2006), provides an organizing procedure through which related textual observations are examined and developed into broader patterns of meaning. In this study, thematic analysis is used as an interpretive complement to close reading rather than as a substitute for detailed literary examination. The comparison therefore emphasizes the relationship between textual evidence and interpretation while recognizing that meanings emerge through the interaction of literary form, narrative context, and theoretical perspective.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study uses documentary textual data obtained from the two selected literary works. The data consist of narrative descriptions, character interactions, dialogue, expressions of personal identity, and other passages relevant to the construction of gender, voice, power, and resistance. Textual data gathering is directed by the three research questions and involves identifying passages that illuminate how Magayon is represented individually and in relation to other characters. The primary unit of analysis is the meaningful textual passage, defined as a segment of literary discourse that provides sufficient contextual information to examine a particular aspect of Magayon's representation. Depending on the structure of the source text, this unit may consist of a descriptive sentence, a dialogue exchange, a stanza or sequence of poetic lines, or a longer narrative episode. The use of flexible analytical units accommodates the formal differences between Eugenio's prose narrative and Bobis's poetic and performative adaptation. The selection of textual passages is guided by their relevance to the research questions, their narrative significance, and their capacity to illuminate similarities or differences between the two literary works. Passages are considered analytically

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relevant when they provide evidence of how Magayon is described, how her voice and actions are represented, how her relationships are structured, or how particular narrative elements contribute to representations of gender and authority. To support the comparison, the analysis distinguishes between passages that demonstrate narrative continuity and those that indicate substantial transformation. Passages illustrating continuity include recognizable characters, relationships, and conflicts retained across the selected narratives. Passages demonstrating transformation include changes in Magayon's characterization, the distribution of narrative voice, her participation in conflict, and the representation of her capacity for self-definition. The selected passages are organized through a comparative analytical matrix that records the source text, location of the passage, relevant narrative episode, textual evidence, preliminary analytical code, and corresponding research question. Where a comparable passage or episode occurs in the other narrative, the relationship between the two is recorded to identify whether the literary adaptation preserves, modifies, expands, or challenges a particular representation. Passages without direct counterparts are also considered when their presence or absence contributes significantly to the interpretation of narrative transformation.

Results and Discussions

The comparative analysis of the traditional *Daragang Magayon* legend documented by Eugenio (2002) and Merlinda Bobis's *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon* (1993) reveals significant transformations in the representation of female identity, narrative voice, agency, embodiment, and relationships to power. Although Bobis retains recognizable characters and narrative circumstances from the traditional legend, her literary reimagining changes the perspectives through which these elements are understood. The following discussion examines five interconnected thematic areas, integrating comparative textual observations with feminist and postcolonial interpretations to demonstrate how Bobis's adaptation reconstructs Magayon's identity while maintaining its relationship to the inherited cultural narrative.

Construction of Female Identity

The comparative analysis reveals a significant transformation in the construction of *Daragang Magayon's* identity between the traditional legend documented by Eugenio (2002) and Merlinda Bobis's Cantata of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon* (1993). In the traditional narrative, *Magayon* is principally characterized through her physical beauty and her position as the daughter of Rajah Makusog. Her identity is further established through her relationships with *Panganoron* and *Pagtuga*, situating her within the narrative as a daughter, beloved, and object of romantic pursuit. Although she occupies a central position in the progression of events, her characterization is predominantly shaped by familial obligations, romantic attachments, and conflicts involving male characters. This representation invites consideration of Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) feminist criticism, which examines how literary conventions may construct women through restrictive ideals of femininity. Within the selected traditional narrative, *Magayon's* beauty and relational identities become central to her narrative significance, demonstrating how female characterization can be organized around socially recognized expectations rather than a more extensive representation of individual subjectivity.

Bobis (1993), however, reconstructs *Magayon* as a warrior whose characterization extends beyond the attributes emphasized in the traditional legend. Her association with hunting, warfare, courage, and resistance broadens the range of experiences and capacities through which her identity can be understood. This transformation is particularly significant because the adaptation does not eliminate beauty or romantic attachment from *Magayon*'s characterization. Instead, these dimensions coexist with physical capability, individual desire, and the capacity to confront restrictive expectations. Ostriker's (1982) concept of revisionist mythmaking provides a relevant perspective for interpreting this reconstruction, as it examines how women writers transform inherited mythological representations by challenging established gendered meanings. Through this process, Bobis reworks a recognizable cultural figure without requiring the complete abandonment of the characteristics associated with her traditional representation.

The transformation also becomes apparent in the relationship between *Magayon's* identity and the circumstances governing her choices. In Eugenio's (2002) narrative, her agreement to marry *Pagtuga* follows the capture of her father, placing her personal desires in conflict with familial responsibility. Although this decision contributes significantly to the development of the story, it emerges from circumstances structured by coercion and male authority. Consequently, *Magayon's* identity as a daughter becomes inseparable from the obligations imposed upon her. Bobis's (1993) reimagining redirects greater attention toward her experiences and responses to such expectations, enabling her to be understood beyond the familial and romantic positions that previously dominated her characterization. This distinction resonates with Rich's (1972) understanding of literary re-vision as a critical reconsideration of inherited

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representations. By revisiting *Magayon's* identity from a different narrative perspective, Bobis questions the limitations of the categories through which the female protagonist has traditionally been understood.

The incorporation of warrior identity is particularly significant because it complicates the conventional association between femininity and passivity. In the traditional narrative, Magayon's significance is closely connected to beauty, romantic relationships, and sacrifice, while heroic action is more prominently associated with the conflicts involving *Panganoron* and *Pagtuga*. Bobis's adaptation redistributes these possibilities by presenting *Magayon* as capable of participating in the physical and symbolic dimensions of heroic struggle. Herrero (2007) similarly identifies Bobis's challenge to established epic conventions as an important dimension of her literary intervention. The present comparison extends this interpretation by demonstrating how the redistribution of heroic possibilities emerges from particular changes in the characterization of *Magayon*. Her transformation into a warrior does not simply introduce a traditionally masculine role into the narrative; it challenges the assumption that heroism and femininity must occupy separate representational categories.

These observations further suggest that female identity in Bobis's adaptation is constructed through multiplicity rather than through the replacement of one fixed representation with another. *Magayon* remains connected to beauty, romantic attachment, family, and cultural belonging, yet these relationships no longer exhaust the possibilities of her characterization. Her identity accommodates strength, vulnerability, desire, and resistance without requiring these attributes to be understood as mutually exclusive. This finding supports Herrero's (2006, 2007) examination of Bobis's reconstruction of gender and identity while clarifying the specific representational changes that become visible through comparison with Eugenio's documented legend. The feminist significance of Bobis's reimagining therefore lies not merely in making *Magayon* stronger but in expanding the narrative possibilities through which female identity can be articulated and recognized.

Narrative Voice and Agency

The representation of narrative voice constitutes another significant distinction between the traditional *Daragang Magayon* legend and Bobis's literary adaptation. In Eugenio's (2002) version, *Magayon* occupies an important position in the narrative, but her experiences are primarily presented through the narration of events and her relationships with other characters. The conflict arising from *Pagtuga's* pursuit and *Makusog's* captivity illustrates how her actions become conditioned by circumstances beyond her control. Although *Magayon* makes consequential decisions, the available alternatives are shaped by familial responsibility and coercive authority. Her agreement to marry *Pagtuga,* for instance, demonstrates both her capacity for decision-making and the limitations surrounding that capacity. This distinction is important because her position in the traditional narrative cannot be reduced to complete silence or passivity. Rather, the narrative presents a female character whose actions remain consequential despite occurring within unequal relationships of power.

Bobis's (1993) Cantata modifies this relationship between narrative participation and authority by giving greater prominence to *Magayon's* subjective experiences. Her first-person articulations allow her to express aspects of her identity, desires, and responses to conflict from a position of greater narrative immediacy. This transformation changes the function of the female protagonist within the narrative. Rather than being represented predominantly through the actions and expectations of surrounding characters, *Magayon* participates more directly in articulating the meanings attached to her experiences. Herrero (2007) identifies the reconstruction of women's voices as an important concern in Bobis's poem-plays, particularly in relation to the challenge they pose to restrictive cultural and gendered classifications. The comparative findings demonstrate how this reconstruction becomes evident through changes in the narrative position afforded to *Magayon,* whose experiences become increasingly central to the representation of conflict and identity.

The significance of this transformation extends beyond the distinction between a character who speaks and one who remains silent. Narrative voice also concerns the authority through which experiences are interpreted and communicated. In the traditional legend, *Magayon's* fate becomes understandable largely through the sequence of events surrounding her relationships with *Makusog, Panganoron,* and *Pagtuga*. Bobis's reimagining, however, foregrounds the female protagonist's consciousness and responses to these circumstances, thereby expanding the interpretive significance of her perspective. This redistribution of narrative attention aligns with Rich's (1972) understanding of re-vision as an opportunity to reconsider inherited representations from alternative positions. Through the reorganization of narrative perspective, Bobis provides *Magayon* with greater capacity to participate in defining the meaning of her identity rather than remaining primarily the subject of descriptions established by others.

Nevertheless, the increased prominence of *Magayon's* voice should not be interpreted as evidence that the adaptation eliminates the structural conditions restricting her agency. Her experiences remain embedded within familial responsibilities, romantic relationships, community expectations, and conflict.

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What changes is her representational position within these circumstances. The traditional narrative emphasizes the decisions and actions through which *Magayon*'s fate is determined, whereas Bobis places greater emphasis on how she experiences, confronts, and negotiates the forces surrounding her. From a feminist perspective, this distinction demonstrates that agency does not necessarily require complete independence from social relationships. Instead, it can be understood through the possibilities available to individuals as they respond to conditions of authority and constraint.

The transformation becomes particularly meaningful when considered alongside *Magayon's* identity as a warrior. Her capacity to engage in physical conflict accompanies an expanded ability to articulate her experiences, connecting agency with both action and narrative expression. The female protagonist is consequently represented not simply as the reason for conflict among male characters but as a participant whose voice contributes to the understanding of that conflict. Herrero's (2006) examination of ethics and identity in Cantata provides a relevant scholarly context for this interpretation, particularly concerning the reconsideration of established representations of the female subject. The present analysis further demonstrates how narrative voice and physical agency operate as interconnected dimensions of Bobis's reconstruction. *Magayon's* transformation is therefore not limited to what she is permitted to do within the story but also concerns the narrative authority through which her experiences acquire meaning.

The Female Body and Heroism

The representation of *Magayon's* body reveals another important dimension of Bobis's feminist reconstruction. In the traditional legend, her physical beauty constitutes a principal feature of her characterization and contributes to the circumstances surrounding romantic pursuit and conflict. Her desirability becomes particularly significant in the relationships involving *Panganoron* and *Pagtuga*, through which love, marriage, and rivalry become central to the progression of events (Eugenio, 2002). Within this narrative structure, the female body acquires meaning partly through the attention and actions of surrounding male characters. *Magayon's* appearance is therefore not merely a descriptive attribute but a feature of the narrative through which femininity becomes associated with desirability, romantic attachment, and sacrifice. This representation may be examined through feminist criticism, which questions literary conventions that position women primarily as objects of admiration or desire rather than as subjects capable of defining their own experiences (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979).

Bobis (1993) retains the significance of *Magayon's* body while reconstructing its relationship to action and agency. Through her characterization as a hunter and warrior, the female body becomes associated with movement, strength, physical capability, and participation in conflict. These attributes challenge the restrictive association between femininity and passivity by demonstrating that a female protagonist can occupy roles conventionally connected with masculine heroism. The designation of *Magayon* as a warrior woman is particularly meaningful because it brings together categories that traditional gender expectations may construct as incompatible. This transformation illustrates the critical possibilities of revisionist mythmaking described by Ostriker (1982), whereby inherited representations are reconstructed to accommodate alternative forms of female identity and experience.

The significance of this reconstruction, however, lies not simply in presenting physical strength as a replacement for beauty. Such an interpretation risks suggesting that female empowerment becomes possible only when women acquire characteristics associated with masculinity. Bobis's reimagining complicates this assumption by retaining *Magayon's* femininity and emotional experiences alongside her physical capability and participation in conflict. Her body consequently becomes a site through which vulnerability, desire, strength, and resistance can coexist. This multidimensional representation is important because it challenges the reduction of female identity to either passive femininity or an entirely oppositional model of empowerment. Instead, the adaptation broadens the possibilities through which the female body can be represented without requiring *Magayon* to reject the characteristics associated with her inherited identity.

The treatment of desire further distinguishes the two narratives. In Eugenio's (2002) version, *Magayon's* romantic relationships contribute to the conflict that ultimately determines her tragic fate. Although her emotional attachments remain important, the narrative gives considerable attention to the events arising from *Pagtuga's* pursuit and the confrontation involving *Panganoron*. Bobis's (1993) adaptation places greater emphasis on *Magayon's* own emotional and subjective experiences, thereby repositioning desire as part of her individual identity rather than exclusively as a circumstance motivating the actions of others. This distinction is significant because it challenges the construction of the female protagonist as merely the object of romantic competition. Desire becomes connected to *Magayon's* experience of herself as a subject, allowing her emotional life to participate in the broader reconstruction of her agency.

The relationship between embodiment and heroism also reinforces the significance of Bobis's engagement with epic conventions. Herrero (2007) observes that Cantata challenges established heroic traditions by foregrounding a female warrior within a literary form historically associated with masculine

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action. The present comparison demonstrates how this challenge becomes visible through the changed narrative function of *Magayon's* body. Whereas the traditional legend places considerable emphasis on her beauty and desirability, Bobis expands her embodied identity to include physical action and participation in struggle. The transformation consequently challenges the gendered distribution of heroic possibilities while retaining the recognizable cultural figure from which the adaptation emerges. Female empowerment in the Cantata therefore operates not through the rejection of femininity but through the reconstruction of the meanings attached to female embodiment.

Power and Resistance

The relationships surrounding *Magayo*n constitute an important site through which power is constructed in both narratives. In the traditional legend, her relationships with *Makusog, Panganoron*, and *Pagtuga* establish the principal circumstances influencing her choices and fate. As Makusog's daughter, she is associated with familial responsibility; as *Panganoron's* beloved, she becomes involved in a romantic relationship central to the narrative; and as the object of *Pagtuga's* pursuit, she faces an imposed marriage arrangement. *Pagtuga's* capture of *Makusog* particularly demonstrates the relationship between gender and coercive authority, as *Magayon's* agreement to marriage emerges from the need to protect her father (Eugenio, 2002). Her decision therefore reflects both personal sacrifice and the unequal distribution of power within the conflict. The narrative illustrates how female agency may operate within circumstances in which the available choices are established through the actions and demands of others.

Bobis's (1993) adaptation revisits these relationships while expanding the significance of *Magayon's* responses to the authority they represent. Her transformation into a warrior allows her to occupy a different position within the conflicts that seek to determine her fate. Rather than being represented primarily as the woman whose future becomes the object of competing male interests, she is associated with the capacity to confront and resist the structures surrounding her. This shift does not eliminate the importance of familial and romantic relationships but changes the perspective through which their implications are understood. From a feminist standpoint, the adaptation challenges the assumption that the female protagonist's identity and choices must remain subordinate to established relational expectations. The transformation consequently involves not merely a change in individual characterization but also a reconsideration of the structures governing female participation in the narrative.

The relationship between *Magayon* and *Pagtuga* provides a particularly important example of this reconstruction. In the traditional legend, *Pagtuga's* actions establish a conflict in which marriage becomes connected to coercion and political authority. His capture of *Makusog* restricts *Magayon's* capacity for independent choice, placing her personal desires within an unequal arrangement of power (Eugenio, 2002). Bobis's reimagining foregrounds *Magayon's* resistance to the circumstances seeking to determine her future, thereby changing the interpretive emphasis of the conflict. Rather than concentrating exclusively on the rivalry involving male characters, the adaptation invites attention to the female protagonist's struggle to negotiate the authority imposed upon her. This distinction is relevant to feminist criticism because it reveals how literary rewriting can challenge the relational structures through which women's experiences and decisions have been represented.

The relationship between *Magayon* and *Panganoron* also illustrates the broader implications of this transformation. In the traditional narrative, their romantic attachment contributes to the conflict that culminates in tragedy and the formation of *Mayon* Volcano. Although their relationship remains significant in Bobis's adaptation, *Magayon's* identity extends beyond her position as *Panganoron*'s beloved (Eugenio, 2002; Bobis, 1993). Her characterization as a warrior and her increased capacity for self-articulation allow her to be understood as an individual subject whose identity cannot be reduced to romantic attachment. This reconstruction challenges the assumption that a female character's narrative significance must be established principally through her relationship with a male protagonist. It also demonstrates how literary adaptation can preserve romantic elements while reconsidering the distribution of agency and narrative authority between the characters.

The relationship between gender and authority becomes more complex when considered in relation to the social structures represented within Bobis's work. Herrero (2007) discusses how the poem-play engages with gendered cultural and performative conventions while reconstructing the experiences and voices of women. Her analysis suggests that resistance in Cantata extends beyond the confrontation between individual characters and involves a broader reconsideration of social expectations governing female identity. McClintock's (1993) examination of gendered familial and collective representations provides a complementary perspective for understanding how women's identities may become entangled with structures of authority and belonging. Although the traditional *Daragang Magayon* legend should not be equated directly with the nationalist contexts examined by McClintock, her discussion underscores the importance of examining how familial and collective expectations may influence representations of female agency.

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Bobis's reconstruction consequently presents resistance as a multidimensional process involving physical action, individual expression, and the negotiation of social relationships. *Magayon*'s transformation into a warrior represents an assertion of agency, but her continued involvement in familial and romantic relationships demonstrates that empowerment does not necessarily require separation from the social world. Instead, her agency is represented through the capacity to confront and reconsider the conditions that attempt to define her identity and choices. This interpretation further distinguishes Bobis's adaptation from a simple reversal of traditional gender roles. The male characters remain important to the narrative, but their continued presence no longer determines the complete boundaries of *Magayon's* identity. The feminist significance of the adaptation therefore lies in reconstructing the relationship between female subjectivity and authority, allowing resistance to emerge within the very relationships through which constraint is experienced.

Feminist and Postcolonial Rewriting

The transformations identified across the two narratives demonstrate that Bobis's Cantata operates through the reinterpretation rather than the complete rejection of the inherited *Daragang Magayon* legend. The adaptation preserves recognizable characters, relationships, and conflicts while reconstructing the meanings attached to the central female protagonist. *Magayon* remains associated with the cultural narrative of Mayon Volcano, yet her identity extends beyond the beauty, romantic attachment, and sacrifice emphasized in the selected traditional version (Eugenio, 2002; Bobis, 1993). This relationship between continuity and transformation is important because the feminist significance of Bobis's reimagining depends partly on the recognizability of the figure she reconstructs. The adaptation invites readers to reconsider established representations precisely because the reimagined *Magayon* remains connected to an inherited cultural story.

From a feminist perspective, the adaptation challenges the distribution of agency and narrative authority within the traditional narrative. *Magayon*'s expanded characterization, first-person articulations, physical capability, and resistance reconstruct her position within a story in which familial responsibility and male conflict previously exercised considerable influence over her experiences. Ostriker's (1982) concept of revisionist mythmaking illuminates this process by demonstrating how inherited myths can become sites for questioning conventional representations of femininity. Similarly, Rich's (1972) understanding of literary re-vision emphasizes the importance of reconsidering familiar narratives through alternative perspectives. Bobis's reworking reflects these critical possibilities by maintaining the recognizable cultural identity of *Magayon* while expanding the range of meanings through which she can be represented.

The postcolonial dimension of this reconstruction involves a related but distinct concern with cultural representation and narrative authority. The traditional *Daragang Magayon* legend is not treated as an inherently colonial or oppressive narrative. Instead, the postcolonial perspective examines how an inherited cultural story can be revisited and interpreted through alternative representational positions. Ashcroft et al. (2002) emphasize the significance of literary practices that challenge established cultural and literary conventions through the development of alternative forms of expression. Within the present study, this perspective directs attention to how Bobis reworks the narrative structures and representations through which *Magayon's* identity has been communicated. The adaptation's postcolonial relevance therefore emerges from its negotiation of cultural meaning and authority, rather than from an assumption that the original legend necessarily represents colonial ideology.

The transformation of narrative form further contributes to this process of reinterpretation. The selected traditional legend presents *Magayon* through a prose narrative organized around recognizable events, relationships, and the explanation of Mayon Volcano's origin. Bobis's *Cantata*, in contrast, employs a poetic and performative mode that creates different possibilities for the expression of the protagonist's experiences. Herrero (2007) identifies Bobis's engagement with epic and performative traditions as an important aspect of her literary intervention, particularly in challenging restrictive conventions of heroic representation. This formal transformation is significant because the reconstruction of female identity operates not only through changes in characterization but also through the literary means by which the story is voiced and performed. Narrative form consequently becomes part of the process through which established meanings are questioned and reconfigured.

The significance of this formal reconstruction becomes clearer when considered alongside Hutcheon's (2013) understanding of adaptation as a creative and interpretive engagement with earlier works. Adaptation does not necessarily require the complete abandonment of recognizable narrative elements; instead, it may involve their transformation through different artistic, cultural, and ideological perspectives. Bobis's Cantata demonstrates this relationship by maintaining the cultural recognizability of *Magayon* while introducing alternative representations of heroism, femininity, and narrative authority. The adaptation therefore functions through a continuing dialogue with the inherited legend. Its critical force emerges from the tension between familiar elements and the new meanings produced through their reconstruction.

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This relationship also complicates the assumption that tradition and transformation must exist in opposition.

In Eugenio's (2002) version, *Magayon's* beauty, familial obligation, and romantic relationships contribute significantly to her characterization and fate. Bobis's (1993) reimagining retains these elements while expanding her identity to include warriorhood, personal expression, and resistance. The coexistence of inherited and reconstructed attributes demonstrates that cultural continuity does not necessarily require the preservation of a single interpretation. Rather, the continued circulation of a narrative may provide opportunities for reconsidering how its characters and values are represented. This interpretation resonates with Herrero's (2006, 2007) discussion of Bobis's negotiation of gender and cultural identity, while the present comparison clarifies the particular narrative changes through which such negotiation becomes evident.

The reconstruction of *Magayon* also raises broader questions concerning who may occupy the position of the cultural hero. In the traditional narrative, the actions of *Panganoron* and *Pagtuga* contribute significantly to the development of conflict, while *Magayon's* characterization remains closely associated with beauty, romantic attachment, and sacrifice. Bobis redistributes heroic possibilities by presenting the female protagonist as a warrior capable of participating in struggle and resistance. This transformation challenges the assumption that heroism must be represented primarily through masculine action. Nevertheless, the adaptation does not simply replace male heroism with female dominance. Instead, it reconstructs the relationship between gender and heroic identity by allowing *Magayon* to embody characteristics that conventional gender categories may position as incompatible. The feminist contribution of this transformation therefore concerns the expansion of representational possibilities rather than the straightforward inversion of established roles.

The interplay between feminist and postcolonial perspectives further demonstrates how literary reimagining can participate in broader discussions of cultural identity. Feminist criticism draws attention to the reconstruction of *Magayon's* agency, voice, and embodiment, while postcolonial criticism considers how the adaptation negotiates the cultural meanings and narrative authority associated with an inherited Philippine legend. These perspectives intersect in the reconsideration of who is permitted to define a recognizable cultural figure and whose experiences are foregrounded within the narrative. Naidas's (2019) postcolonial examination of Bobis's Fish Hair Woman provides a related critical context for understanding the author's engagement with cultural representation and narrative meaning. However, the present study contributes a distinct comparative focus by examining how the reconstruction of female identity becomes visible through specific continuities and departures between two selected versions of the *Daragang Magayon* narrative.

Importantly, the comparison does not establish an absolute distinction between a passive traditional heroine and an entirely liberated contemporary protagonist. The traditional *Magayon* makes consequential decisions, even when her choices are constrained by coercion and familial responsibility. Similarly, Bobis's warrior woman continues to experience vulnerability, emotional attachment, and social expectations despite her expanded narrative agency. Recognizing these complexities prevents the analysis from reducing the two texts to opposing representations of female weakness and strength. Instead, the findings demonstrate how agency is constructed differently within particular narrative circumstances and how literary rewriting can expand the possibilities available to an inherited cultural figure without eliminating the tensions associated with her identity.

These findings have implications for the study of Philippine literary retellings, particularly in understanding how traditional narratives may participate in contemporary discussions of gender and cultural representation. The comparison demonstrates that inherited cultural figures can remain recognizable while acquiring additional meanings through changes in characterization, narrative perspective, embodiment, and relationships to power. It also highlights the value of examining literary adaptations alongside selected traditional counterparts, as such comparisons make visible representational transformations that may receive less attention when works are considered independently. Nevertheless, the implications of the present analysis remain bounded by its corpus, which consists of one documented traditional version and one literary reimagining. The study therefore does not presume that all versions of the *Daragang Magayon* legend share identical gender representations or that all contemporary Philippine adaptations employ the same strategies of feminist and postcolonial reconstruction.

Taken together, the comparative findings demonstrate that Bobis's Cantata of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon* challenges inherited representations not by erasing the cultural identity of *Magayon* but by reconstructing the narrative possibilities attached to her. Through the interconnected transformation of characterization, voice, embodiment, and relationships to power, the adaptation repositions Magayon as a more multidimensional female subject capable of participating in the construction of her own identity. The significance of Bobis's reimagining consequently extends beyond the introduction of a female warrior into a familiar legend. It demonstrates how literary rewriting can preserve recognizable elements of cultural

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memory while questioning the representational conventions through which gender, heroism, and narrative authority are understood.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical principles in literary research by ensuring academic integrity, accurate representation of textual evidence, and proper acknowledgment of scholarly sources. As a qualitative comparative textual analysis involving published literary works, the study does not involve human participants or the collection of personal data. All interpretations are grounded in the selected texts and supported by appropriate citations following APA 7th edition guidelines. Furthermore, the analysis respects the cultural significance of the *Daragang Magayon* legend and avoids misrepresenting its traditional meanings while critically examining its feminist and postcolonial reinterpretation.

Conclusion

This study examined the representation of *Daragang Magayon* in the traditional legend documented by Eugenio (2002) and Merlinda Bobis's *Cantata* of the Warrior Woman *Daragang Magayon* (1993). The comparative analysis reveals that while the traditional narrative primarily constructs *Magayon* through beauty, familial obligation, romantic attachment, and sacrifice, Bobis reimagines her as a multidimensional female subject whose identity encompasses strength, desire, and resistance. This transformation demonstrates how literary rewriting can expand inherited representations of femininity without completely abandoning their cultural foundations. The findings further establish that the two narratives differ in their construction of female agency, voice, and relationships to power. Whereas *Magayon's* choices in the traditional legend are largely constrained by familial responsibilities and male authority, Bobis's adaptation foregrounds her subjective experiences and capacity for self-definition. Her transformation consequently reflects not absolute independence from social structures but an expanded ability to negotiate and challenge the circumstances shaping her identity. Bobis's reimagining functions as a feminist and postcolonial counter-narrative by reconsidering established representations of gender, heroism, and cultural authority. Rather than rejecting the traditional legend, the adaptation reconstructs its meanings through alternative narrative perspectives. The study contributes to Philippine literary scholarship by demonstrating how comparative literary analysis can illuminate the relationship between cultural continuity and the reconstruction of female identity. However, its conclusions remain limited to the two selected texts, highlighting opportunities for further investigation of other Philippine literary retellings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, future researchers are encouraged to examine other versions of the *Daragang Magayon* legend to explore how representations of female identity, agency, and power vary across cultural and literary contexts. Further studies may also investigate contemporary Philippine literary retellings through feminist and postcolonial perspectives to better understand how traditional narratives are reconstructed. Additionally, greater attention may be given to narrative voice, language, and performative elements in Bobis's *Cantata* to deepen the understanding of its literary and cultural significance. Such investigations may contribute to the continuing appreciation, preservation, and critical reinterpretation of Philippine folk literature.

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