

# In the Concrete Now: Investigating Feminist Challenges to Popular Romance Production

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*This paper assesses feminist position-taking in the realm of capitalist book production through a close reading of four novels written by Joi Barrios for the Rosas series. The paper adopts, as a heuristic tool, a particular focus on masculine domination in order to analyze the construction of masculinity. The construction of the male textual subject is regarded as a significant moment in advancing the feminist challenge to patriarchal stereotypes reproduced in mainstream romance novels. Barrios' 'alternative feminist' romance novels demonstrate a symptomatic exposition of masculine domination through a defamiliarization of the domestic, an approach that is suggestive of a break with our embeddedness in the social world and the taken-for-granted notions about its givenness and order. However, Barrios' reluctance towards decisive ruptures in the representations of masculinity and femininity affirms the enduring effects of the masculine and feminine habitus and the structuring structure of masculinedomination.*

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## Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity

This paper examines the relational construction of masculinity in alternative romance novels written by Joi Barrios for the Rosas Series. It rests on the argument that the feminist challenge to patriarchy requires a reimaging of women that is conscious of the relational character of gender representation. The construction of masculinity in literary text is, therefore, a crucial feature of a counter-hegemonic feminist reconstruction of social relations.

The publication of the Rosas Series represents an interesting moment in the history of popular literary production if only for its attempt at challenging the logic of the culture industry, which is the pursuit of profit through the reproduction of the dominant aspects of culture, including the normalizing discourses that are deployed by the different institutions in society.

Published by Anvil, the Rosas Series launched its alternative feminist romance novels in 1991 (Barrios 2001; Encanto 1996). This series of romance novels attempted to challenge the patriarchal

stereotypes of women that have been propagated by the highly popular *Valentine Romances*, *Flame*, *18 Karat*, *Pinoy Romances*, and others. As an alternative romance novel, the Rosas Series appropriates the popular form as a means to question stereotypes and to raise women's consciousness by offering them alternative representations of themselves (Encanto 1996). To achieve this, the writers of Rosas were

encouraged to explore the potentials of the romance as a vehicle for propagating feminist themes and messages, they [were] not required to stick to the standard formula of romantic fiction or even to faithfully adhere to the conventions of the romance, like convoluted plots, the use of stock characters and a happy ending. The writers [were] given the widest latitude in their choice of subject theme and techniques and writing style. (Encanto 1996: 182)

Lualhati Bautista, who was the editor of the Rosas Series, encouraged the writing of novels which censure sexism and tackle women's issues (Barrios 2001). Bautista issued the following guidelines for the Rosas writers: "1. The novel should get away from escapism and does not have to end happily; 2. It does not necessarily have to be written from the woman's point of view; 3. The language does not have to be sexist" (Encanto 1996: 182). Bautista screened the manuscripts "to ensure that there are no sexist overtones or words" and "to enhance [the] effectiveness [of the novels] as vehicles for advocating the feminist point of view" (Encanto 1996: 61).

A year after it was launched, the Rosas Series discontinued publication due to its low sales.<sup>1</sup> Despite its short-lived production, distribution, and circulation, the Rosas Series remains, as Encanto (1996: 209) argues, "an important development in the history of Tagalog romance because it has been able to draw attention to problems of women in contemporary times, and focus on their struggle for liberation".

One of the means by which the Rosas Series novels were able to advance the feminist challenge to patriarchal stereotypes was through their construction of the male subject. This paper inquires into this construction, as well as its implications for the analysis of cultural production as reproduction. In particular, this paper analyzes four of the 12 novels written by Joi Barrios. Among the writers of the Rosas

Series, Barrios is one of the two who have written the most number of novels in the series.

### Writing the Romance, Romancing Masculinity

In her collection of novellas titled *Ang aking Prince Charming at iba pang noveleta ng pag-ibig*, Barrios provides detailed guidelines in writing the romance novel. Her tone is didactic yet playful and parodic. The rigorous instructions on character sketches, plot, conflict, and ending are counterpointed by her declaration that “[h]indi naman gaanong kumplikado ang pagsusulat ng romance novel. Kayang-kaya ika nga. Lalo na kung wala ka nang pambayad ng upa sa bahay o di kaya’y pamalengke sa Farmers” (Writing the romance novel is not that difficult. Especially when you do not have money anymore to pay the rent or to buy at Farmers<sup>2</sup>) (Barrios 2001: 290). With this statement, Barrios demystifies the popular form of literary production by exposing the mercenary motive of writers.

This demystification includes the publishers and readers as well, as when Barrios (2001: 294) declares:

...kung gagawin nating realistiko ang nobelang romansa, madalas magiging malungkot ang pagtatapos ng kwento. Hindi maaari ito. Hindi nabebenta ang mga nobelang malulungkot. Malulugi ang iyong pablisar at masusuklam siya sa iyo. Bababa ang iyong presyo’t wala nang maglalathala sa iyong mga nobela...Ipagpilitan mo ang ending na masaya. Huwag magtampisaw sa sarili mong hinagpis at hinaing. Itanghal ang dakilang pag-ibig. Nagbabayad ang mambabasa ng trenta pesos. Inaasahan nila’y saglit na pag-asa para sa lahat ng pusong nagmamahal. Huwag na huwag mo silang bibiguin. (If we write realist romance novels, the stories’ endings would be sad. This cannot happen. Sad novels do not sell. Your publisher will lose money and take it against you. Your value as a writer will go down and no one will publish you anymore...Insist on happy endings. Do not wallow in your own anguish and despair. Extoll the virtues of great love. The readers are paying thirty pesos. They are expecting hope for all romantics even momentarily. You must not let them down.)

With these guidelines, Barrios points to the limits imposed by the profit motive of the capitalist mode of book publishing, and how

such material conditions of production mediate the construction of a reading public. In this instance, Barrios articulates the tacit “hypothesis of spontaneous correspondence or deliberate matching of production to demand or commissions” (Bourdieu 1993: 34) and breaks away from what Bourdieu (1993: 34) calls “the charismatic image of artistic activity as pure, disinterested creation by an isolated artist”. The audience, in a way, creates the artist.

The “spontaneous correspondence” also manifests in Barrios’ construction of the ‘ideal’ masculine textual subject. According to her, the male character should be: “gwapo, matangkad (hindi pwede ang pandak); nagpapanggap na masungit ngunit ang totoo’y ubod ng bait; mayaman o kaya’y may lihim na kayamanan; at mailap, pagkat kung sa simula pa lang ay patay na patay na sa bidang babae ay tapos na ang kwento hindi pa man nagsisimula” (Barrios 2001: 291). (tall, handsome [short ones will not do]); pretends to be ill-tempered at first but turns out to be really good natured; rich or has secret wealth; and distant, the guy cannot be head over heels over the girl at the onset otherwise there is no story.)

Barrios’ explanations as to why these should be the male character’s attributes are anchored on the premise that romance novels are for mass production and distribution. For instance, she argues that male characters should be handsome because: “Paano mo siya hindi gagawing gwapo gayong kailangang mapaibig niya hindi lamang ang bidang babae kundi ang nagbabasang babae? At gaya na nga ng sabi nila, libre naman ang pangarap kaya mangarap na nang lubos-lubos. Tall, dark and handsome ang mga bidang lalaki” (Barrios 2001: 291). (How could you not make him handsome when he needs to win the heart not just of the female lead character but also of the female reader? And as they say, since one cannot put a ceiling on dreams, might as well reach for the moon. Male lead characters are tall, dark and handsome.)

As for the male character being ill-tempered and distant, Barrios (2001: 291-292) has this to say:

Diyang lalong nagiging kapana-panabik ang kwento. Iyon bang dahil sa kaniyang kasungitan ay lagi silang nagtatalo ng bidang babae. Iyon bang nagagalit siya kung minsan dahil ang iniisip lang pala niya’y ang kapakanan ng bidang babe. Iyon bang kaya lang pala lagi siyang parang mailap ay dahil hindi niya matanggap na mahal na mahal niya ang

babae. Ito ay fantasy nating lahat para sa lahat ng lalaki sa ating buhay. Iyon bang hindi naman pala talaga masungit. Madalas kasi, masungit sila at nagiging masungit na magpakailanman. (It is because of these elements that the story becomes engaging. Because of his ill temper, the male lead character finds himself in many occasions of conflict with the female lead character. It turns out that in these occasions he is merely protecting the female lead's well-being. He is seemingly distant because he resists his feelings for the woman he loves. These are our fantasies for all the men in our life. That their ill temper is merely a façade. More often than not, they are ill tempered and they continue to be so forever.)

Barrios' tone, however, shifts to a serious mode in her discussion of her experience as a writer of alternative romance novels for the Rosas series. She ventured into the field because: "...[m]agandang ideya ito, naisip ko. Sanay akong nagsisimula ng pagsusulat mula sa isang isyu. Ganito ang karanasan ko sa dulaang panlansangan. Sa isyu nagsisimula ang isang akda. Kaya nga isyu rin ang pagsisimulan ko sa pagsusulat ng romansa" (Barrios 2001: 295). (...this is a good idea, to my mind. I am used to writing from the standpoint of an issue. This has been my experience in the theater of the streets. An author ultimately begins from an issue. That is why in writing romance novels, I also begin from issues.)

Here, the reader can see that Barrios affirms the Rosas Series as a field of position-taking based on a certain form of belief, i.e., the viability of producing and selling alternative feminist romance novels in the market of capitalist commodities. This approach runs counter to the "reductionist vision which claims to explain the act of production and its product in terms of their conscious or unconscious external functions, by referring them, for example, to the interests of the dominant class or, more subtly, to the ethical or aesthetic values of one or another of its fractions, from which the patrons or audiences are drawn" (Bourdieu 1993: 34).

However, Barrios does not provide a detailed guideline for writing the alternative romance novel other than the assertion that "isyu rin ang pinagsisimulan ko sa pagsulat ng romansa". (My writing of romance also starts with issues.) This shows how an alternative field of position-taking (writing alternative romance novels) in the cultural field, which derives much of its theory and practice (how to

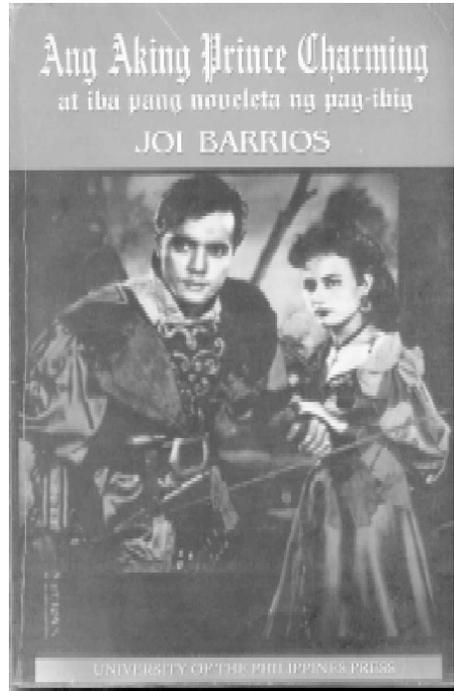
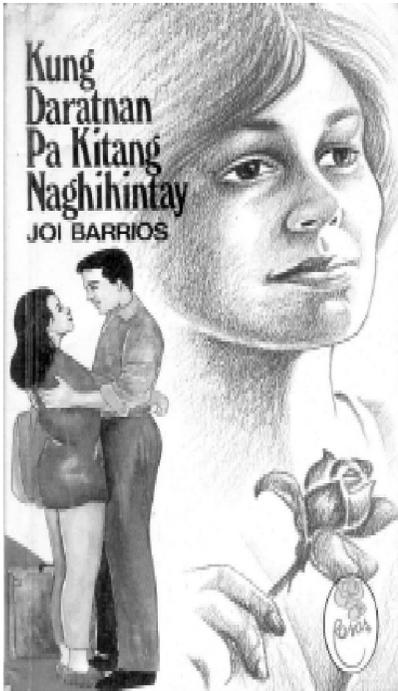
write alternative romance novels), relies on the practice of a formulated belief (the necessity of writing and selling alternative romance novels). I shall explore this “gap” between belief and practice by looking into the performance of masculinity as constitutive of a critique of masculine domination offered in Barrios’ novels.

## Reading the Masculine Textual Subject

This study is a textual analysis of four Rosas novels written by Joi Barrios. These are *Kung Daratnan Pa Kitang Naghibintay*, *Sintang Malapit Sintang Malayo*, *Ang Kwento ni Jessica*, and *Ang Kwento ni Sandra*. Specifically, this study explores an author’s (re)construction of masculinity in the context of feminist writing. In order to analyze the reconstruction of the masculine textual subject, it is important to situate and locate this within the whole symbolic system of masculine domination. Masculine domination, in this context, is constitutive of

[t]he social order that functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded: it is the sexual division of labor, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each sex, of their place, time, and instruments; it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women, or, within the house, between the male part, the hearth, and the female part — the stable, the water and vegetable stores; it is the structure of time, the day, and the farming year, or the cycle of life, with its male moments of rupture and the long female periods of gestation. (Bourdieu 2001: 11)

Thus, as a category of analysis, masculine domination underscores the practice of masculinity as a relationship of power and a “cultivated disposition”, constituted through body practice and mental constructions, which produces a series of ritual exchanges in the daily practices of life” (Conway-Long 1994: 70). To examine the (re)construction of masculinity in Joi Barrios’ feminist texts, I shall focus on the various moments of masculine domination at different points in the narratives.



Author Joi Barrios wrote *Kung Daratnan Pa Kitang Naghihintay* in 1991 (left) and *Ang Aking Prince Charming at iba pang noveleta ng pag-ibig* in 2001 which included the stories *Sintang Malapit Sintang Malayo*, *Ang Kwento ni Jessica* (retitled *Ang Ikalawang Mrs. Hernandez*) and *Ang Kwento ni Sandra* (retitled *Isang Saglit sa Tag-araw*) (right).

## Performing Masculinity

In *Kung Daratnan Pa Kitang Naghihintay*, Lisa flies back to her hometown as a recipient of the outstanding alumna award. She volunteers to direct the school play for the summer. She imagines herself as the prodigal daughter who, despite her disregard for her father's plans for her, succeeds in her chosen career in the performing arts. Lisa's return not only compels her to address her conflict with her father but also leads her to confront the unresolved issues with Tony, a former boyfriend.

Tony's defensive disposition in this particular scene suggests that a past relationship has yet to be settled:

Praktikal na tao si Tony. Alam niyang hindi naman namin maiiwasan ang isa't-isa sa pagkakaparito ko sa San Antonio. At gaya nga ng dati pa niyang prinsipyo sa buhay na “you should get things over and done with”, unang araw ko pa lang sa eskwela, kinausap na niya ako, “Clearing the air,” kung baga. (36) (Tony is practical. With me back in San Antonio, he knew that we could not avoid bumping into each other. And consistent with his principle in life ‘you should get things over and done with,’ he spoke to me on my first day at school, he was ‘clearing the air’ so to speak.)

In this story, Lisa’s active position as someone who came to volunteer her expertise is undermined by her incapacity to set the rules of engagement with Tony. Thus, by virtue of ‘masculine practicality’ assumed to be innate in Tony, he manages to define the situation first and thereby ‘clear the air’ with the implicit rules of the game. This exhibition of the masculine preference for closure, as opposed to spontaneity and fluidity associated with the feminine, is crucial in building up the masculine subject as an unattainable love object of desire. This construction of masculinity vis-à-vis feminine desire follows the logic of female castration whereby desire is constituted as ‘lack’ and is at the same time a condition for the possibility of desire. This cycle in turn constitutes the heterosexual matrix, an element in the masculine order that is responsible for the effective reproduction of the sexual division of labor.

Further, this portrayal of masculinity is crucial to the development of the romantic plot. More specifically, as Barrios had pointed out when she explained why male characters should be ill-tempered and distant, this characterization feeds on the readers’ preoccupation with fantasy. This fantasy construction is founded on the masculine subject’s disavowal of desire for the woman within the symbolic order. However, this disavowal is neither a negation of desire on the part of the masculine subject, nor a simple dissimulation to protect the ego. Rather, it is a manifestation of the masculine subject’s domination visibly and indisputably, as when Tony exhibits his tantrums:

Minarkahan kong Problem No. 1 ang away namin dahil sa pag-attend ko ng mga rally. At syempre, dahil meron na ngang Problem No. 1, hindi na rin nalalayo ang Problem No. 2. Pumasok na sa eksena ang

masalimuot na daigdig ng teatro...Noong una, masaya ako dahil mukhang proud naman si Tony nang finally, pagkatapos kong maging props girl, ay ma-cast na rin ako sa isang play. Noong opening night ko, naroon si Tony, with matching single red rose. Touched na touched ako...Kaya lang natapos ang pagiging number one fan ni Tony sa aking acting career nang pasuutin ako ng nightgown ng director sa isang dula. Nabulabog kasi ang conservative tendencies niya. "Tingnan mo nga yang costume mo. Hindi ka ba nahihiya niyan? Nakikitaan ka na, a." (18) (I marked as Problem No. 1 our fights over my participation in rallies. Since I already had Problem No. 1, there is sure to be Problem No. 2. The complex world of the theatre came into the picture...At first I was happy because he seemed proud that I finally became part of the cast, after being a props girl. On the first night of the play, Tony was there with a red rose to boot. I was so touched...However, Tony stopped being my number one fan when the director required me to wear a nightgown in a play. His conservative tendencies were challenged. "Look at your costume. Aren't you ashamed? They can already see through your clothes.")

The same display of masculine domination can be seen in *Sintang Malapit Sintang Malayo*. This romance novel tackles the issue of mail-order brides. The plot revolves around the love triangle of Fely, a twenty-six-year-old teacher; Aaron, her love interest; and Rainier, Fely's German pen pal. Fely and Aaron are childhood friends. But as they grow up and become more conscious of their sexuality, the two drift apart in order to keep their desires at bay. Thus, they second-guess each other's next move as they engage in the game of seduction. One day, Fely prepares to meet Rainier who means to marry her. Interestingly, Aaron never presents himself as Rainier's rival. He never even tries to win Fely's affection until the final scene. Aaron's disavowal of desire for Fely consists in his assertion of authority in making crucial choices:

"Huwag ka sanang magagalit. Payong kapatid lamang ito."//Nagalit si Fely pero hindi siya nagpahalata. Una, dahil sa lahat ng ayaw niya kay Aaron ay 'yong ugali nitong magsermon. Palaging gusto niyang turuan kung ano ang dapat kong gawin. Akala yata, titser na siya't lahat, wala pa rin siyang sariling isip. Ikalawa, dahil gusto na niyang awatin ito sa pagturing sa kaniya bilang kapatid. Tama na iyang

pabrotherly-brotherly love at iba naman ang gusto niya talaga.// Nagpatuloy sa inihandang speech si Aaron.// “Ang sa akin lang naman Fely, huwag kang padalos-dalos. Kung sabagay, mukha namang mabait iyang si Rainier, pero hindi mo pa naman talaga kilala yan. Malay mo, baka kung kailan naroon ka na sa Germany, saka lumabas ang mga sungay niyan. Iyong iba nga diyang nababalitaan ko, pagdating sa ibang bansa, binubugbog ng asawa. Meron pa nga akong nabasa sa newspaper, pinatay daw matapos na ipa-insure ng lalaki. Pinagkakakitaan lang pala.”//Nawala lahat nang galit ni Fely. Diyata’t concerned naman pala itong si Aaron sa kaniya?...//“Hindi naman sa pinapagalitan kita, ang sinasabi ko lang kahit noon pa, padalos-dalos ka na sa mga desisyon mo.” (44) (“I hope you won’t get angry. This is just brotherly advice.”//Fely got angry but she did not show it. First, what she hated most about Aaron was his tendency to sermonize. He always liked telling me what to do. Maybe he thought that, despite being a teacher and all, she still could not think for herself. Second, she wanted him to stop treating her like a sister. Enough of this brotherly love. It was not what she really wanted. Aaron continued his prepared speech.//“What I am pointing out, Fely, is that you should not rush into things. Well, Rainier looks kind but you don’t really know him that well. You never know, he might finally show you his horns once you get to Germany. I have heard of some women who got mauled by their husbands after they arrived. I read in the papers that one was murdered after she was insured by her husband. She was just exploited.”//Fely’s anger vanished. Could it be that, after all, Aaron was just concerned for her?//“It’s not that I am lecturing you. What I am saying is that, even before, you tended to rush into your decisions.”)

The construction of male subjectivity in this instance purports that male authority is a correlative of a man’s concern for the love object. In this context, the fulfillment of female fantasy resides in constructing male authority as such — a precondition for romance. Thus, it is only by romancing the instances of masculine domination that the conditions of possibility for a union or a relationship can be laid. Aaron’s acts of perceptive chivalry extends to a duel with Rainier:

“Perhaps when Fely is already settled in Germany...” Nag-alanganin ng bahagya si Aaron kung ipagpapatuloy niya ang kaniyang sasabihin. Baka mahalata ng Aleman ang pagseselos niya.//“What were you saying Aaron?”//“What I mean is, a...should Fely decide to settle in Germany, I’m sure that her parents would be visiting her every year.”//Nanlaki ang mga mata ni Rainier. Hindi nito naisip na kailangan niyang pakasalan ang buong pamilya ni Fely.//Naaalala ni Aaron na nakita niyang kausap ng tatay ni Fely si Rainier noong isang gabi.//“Fely’s father was just talking to you the other night...”//Hindi tumanggi ang Aleman.//“Oh, yes, and come to think of it, he did mention that he had always wanted to go to Europe.”...//“And please don’t get offended by Fely should she want to send money to her parents. You see that is the custom in our country. Parents expect dollars from their children abroad.”//Pinawisan si Rainier. Naalala nitong may binanggit ang tatay ni Fely tungkol sa pagpapadala ng kaunting tulong. Naisip nitong baka mamiligro ang kabuhayan niya.//“Well Fely wouldn’t be earning anything in Germany since she’s not going there to work.”//Nagkunwang sindak na sindak si Aaron.//“You mean she will stop teaching?”//Dinaan ni Rainier sa tawa ang usapan.//“Of course. She will be so busy having babies and taking care of the house and helping me with the business.”//Umiling-iling si Aaron.//“She will miss teaching.”//“Only for a while.”//“No. Always.” (41) (“Perhaps when Fely is already settled in Germany...” Aaron slightly hesitated in expressing what he was about to say. The German might notice his jealousy. “What were you saying Aaron?”//“What I mean is, a...should Fely decide to settle in Germany, I’m sure that her parents would be visiting her every year.”//Rainier looked surprised. He did not think he was also marrying a whole family. Aaron remembered seeing Fely’s father talking to Rainier the other night.//“Fely’s father was just talking to you the other night...”//The German did not deny the incident. “Oh, yes, and come to think of it, he did mention that he had always wanted to go to Europe.”...//“And please don’t get offended if Fely should want to send money to her parents. You see, that is the custom in our country. Parents expect dollars from their children abroad.”//Beads of sweat appeared on Rainier’s forehead. He remembered Fely’s father telling him about sending home a little bit of help. He thought about the strains this might have on his income.//“Well, Fely wouldn’t be earning anything in Germany since she’s not going there to work.”//Aaron feigned apprehension,

“You mean she will stop teaching?”//Rainier broke the tension by laughing. “Of course. She will be so busy having babies and taking care of the house and helping me with the business.”//Aaron shook his head.“She will miss teaching.”//“Only for a while.”//“No. Always.”)

This encounter, and the previous one with Fely, displays not only Aaron’s mastery of male authority but also his astute appreciation of concrete conditions. Not only is he the voice of reason, he is also the voice of resistance to racial and class contradictions that constitute their love triangle. The female voice in this instance is muted while the male voice reaches the sharpest of insights on the issue of mail-order brides.

In another encounter, witness that Fely is not without insight about her muted voice; rather, she is limited by social conventions on intercourse between the sexes, sexual and otherwise:

Gusto ni Fely na sumali din sa pag-uusap. Naiinis siya sa dalawa dahil nag-uusap ang mga ito na para bang wala siya sa likuran. At naiinis din siya sa sarili niya dahil hindi naman siya makasingit sa diskusyon. Ang mga lalaki, naisip niya, kapag nag-uusap sila, laging parang sila-sila. Usapang lalaki. Kahit na tungkol sa mga babae ang pinag-uusapan. Kahit pinagtatanggol ka nila, gaya ng ginagawa ni Aaron ngayon. Sila-sila pa rin kahit magkaiba ang kulay ng balat nila. (31) (Fely also wants to join the conversation. She is irritated that these two speak to each other as if she were not there behind them. She is also irritated because she could not get into the conversation. These men, she thought to herself, when they talk to each other, it’s as if women do not exist. Male talk. Even if women are the subject of their conversation. Even if they are protecting you, as Aaron is doing right now. When men talk, they talk only to each other, despite the difference in their skin color.)

Fely’s realization of her position in their love triangle shaped by the heterosexual matrix rejects the symbolic violence perpetrated by masculine domination. As she speaks her mind through the narrator, Barrios highlights the disposition of the woman (Fely) in the economy of symbolic goods. In this context:

symbolic violence is exercised only through an act of knowledge and practical recognition which takes place below the level of the consciousness...But a relation of domination that functions only through the complicity of dispositions depends profoundly, for its perpetuation or transformation, on the perpetuation or transformation of the structures of which those dispositions are the product (and in particular on the structure of a market in symbolic goods whose fundamental law is that women are treated as objects which circulate upward). (Bourdieu 2001: 42)

This means that Fely's muted voice is a product of a thoughtful mediation into the relationship between the dispositions of the subaltern and the objective structure of masculine domination. Thus, the voice of insight cannot come from Fely but from the narrator because "[s]ymbolic power cannot be exercised without the contribution of those who undergo it because they construct it as such" (Bourdieu 2001: 40).

Bourdieu (2001: 40) maintains further that:

instead of stopping at this statement (as constructivism in its idealist ethnomethodological forms) one has also to take note of and explain the social construction of the world and its powers. It then becomes clear that, far from being the conscious, free, deliberate act of an isolated 'subject', this practical construction is itself an effect of a power, durably embedded in the bodies of the dominated in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions...which sensitize them to certain manifestations of power.

Barrios' assertion of the narrator as the bearer of consciousness takes into consideration the durability of the impact of masculine domination on the habitus<sup>3</sup> and the necessity of intervention into its objective structure. In the first instance, Barrios avoids existentialist voluntarism that would have mechanistically radicalized Fely despite the limitations of the plot (setting, duration of the story). The narrator's exclusion from the plot (in the sense that she is not one of the characters) grants her voice the symbolic power that is able to match the objective structure of masculine domination established as the plot's context. The critique of objective structures, therefore, is a

political act of intervention into the text and not merely a consequence of some of the characters' tendencies and dispositions. This highlights the writer's active assertion of political stakes put forward through the text.

A similar strategy of intervention is used in *Ang Kwento ni Jessica* and *Ang Kwento ni Sandra*. However, the narrator takes on the female voice of the female character. These stories are connected by a common plot. Jessica is a self-made woman with a respectable career as a TV host of children's shows. Her husband, Louie, is a mid-level manager of an engineering firm. Louie leaves Jessica for Sandra, a twenty-one-year old fresh graduate who works at the same firm as Louie.

In the prologue for *Ang Kwento ni Jessica*, Barrios explains her use of voice in the narrative:

Pwedeng kwento ito ni Louie dahil limang taon ang pinagsamahan nila ni Jessica. O ni Karlo dahil naging mahalaga ang papel niya nitong mga huling araw kay Jessica. Pero ang mas mabuting pagsalitain natin dito ay si Jessica, dahil ngayon lang siya magsasalita. Saka higit kina Karlo at Louie, kwento ito ni Jessica, kaya mas mabuting siya na rin mismo ang magkwento. (55) (This story could be Louie's because he was with Jessica for five years. It could also be Karlo's because he has had an important role in Jessica's life in the past days. But it is better that we allow Jessica to speak this time because this is the first time she is going to be heard. Besides, more than Karlo's and Louie's, this is Jessica's story, so it's best that we let her tell her own story.)

For *Ang Kwento ni Sandra*:

Sa isa sa mga kabanata sa nasabing nobela (*Ang Kwento ni Jessica*), may isang babaeng kinatagpo si Jessica. Si Sandra. Ngunit dahil si Jessica ang nagsasalita sa nobelang iyon, narinig lang natin ang mga sinabi ni Sandra kay Jessica. Ang hindi natin nalaman ay kung ano ang tumatakbo sa utak ni Sandra habang nakikipag usap ito kay Jessica. (111) (In one of the chapters of the said novel [*Ang Kwento ni Jessica*], Jessica met this woman – Sandra. However, because it was Jessica speaking throughout this novel, we only heard what Sandra said to Jessica. What we do not get to know is what was running through Sandra's mind while talking to Jessica.)

In these two novels, Barrios attempts to appropriate the lyric construction “to take as model not male myths but one’s experience” (Russ 1995:88). This assertion comes from an observation of the “lack of workable myths in literature, of acceptable dramatizations of what our experience means” (Russ 1995:88). Russ laments that this condition limits our perception of “what happens to us in the mythic terms our culture provides” (89-90). Thus in *Ang Kwento ni Jessica* and *Ang Kwento ni Sandra*, we witness a series of scenes connected not by chronology but by association of particular themes.

The communicative exchange between Sandra and Louie, and Jessica and Louie, is seldom and far between. The relationship of these two women to Louie is established through Sandra’s and Jessica’s musing or what I label as contemplative strategy<sup>4</sup>. Barrios’ contemplative strategy exposes the insights of the voice of Jessica and Sandra, otherwise muted in their exchanges with Louie.

Jessica:

Cool si Louie. Ni hindi umilag. Ni hindi ako inawat. Siguro guilty. O siguro talagang cool lang siyang tao. O siguro ganoon ba talaga ang mga lalaki pag merong ka-affair. Hindi nila kailangang mag-hysteria dahil sila ang paalis. Hindi sila ang iniwan.//Pinulot ni Louie ang ashtray ...at ang mga libro. Tapos, umupo siya sa gilid ng kama.// Nagpaawat ako sa hysteria. Nagmumukha akong gaga, naiisip ko. Lalo akong nawawalan ng dignidad.//Kasabay nito lalo akong nainis sa sarili. Dahil pag nagagalit ako, kayang-kaya ni Louie na magpaka-cool at dahil naghi-hysterical ako, ako ang nagmumukhang unreasonable. Kailanman hindi nagiging tama ang mga taong unreasonable. (58-59) (Louie’s cool. He was not evasive. Nor did he stop me. He may have been feeling guilty. Or maybe he is just cool as a person. Or maybe men are really like that when they have affairs. They do not need to get hysterical because they are the ones who leave. They are not the ones who are left behind.//Louie picked up the ashtray...and the books. Then he sat at the side of the bed.//I calmed down from my hysteria. I am looking like a fool, I thought to myself. I am losing whatever dignity I have left.//At the same time, I felt more annoyed with myself. Because when I get angry, Louie is able to stay cool; and because I am the one who gets hysterical, I am the one who seems unreasonable. Unreasonable people are never right.)

Sandra:

Kung paanong nag-ensayo ako sa interview ko five years ago, nag-ensayo rin ako ngayon. Tumatakbo ang dayalogo ko habang isa-isa kong tinitiklop ang mga damit at isinisilid sa isang maleta.//Iyong isusuot ko mamaya para sa pagdating ni Louie, naibukod ko na. Red floral house dress. Kabaligtaran ng sinuot kong grey linen dress noong interview. House dress kasi, nasa bahay lang naman ako; floral kasi, floral naman halos lahat ng mga house dress ko; at pula dahil pakiramdam ko, kailangan ko ng fighting spirit para masabi ang lahat ng kailangan kong sabihin.//Ano nga ba ang mga artikulo tungkol sa paghihiwalay na ganito? Marami akong nabasa tungkol sa “How to Catch the Man You Adore” at “How to Keep Your Man” at “How to Cope When a Man Leaves You”. Pero wala yata akong nabasa tungkol sa “How to Tell Someone Your’e Leaving Him”.//“Louie, maghiwalay na tayo.”//Ito ang pinakadirect na naisip ko. Opening at closing line rolled up into one sentence...Syempre naiisip ko na meron ding hindi tama sa ganitong approach. Parang ako lang ang nagdedesiyon. Parang hindi naman talaga namin napag-usapan ni Louie. Dapat yata mapakinggan ko rin ang side niya kahit pa buo na sa isip ko ang paghihiwalay.//”Louie, may problema tayo.”//Itatanong ni Louie kung ano ang problema. “Ano iyon?” Kung okay ang mood niya, uupo siya sa silya o sa kama (depende kung alin ang mas malapit sa kaniya), palalapitin ako at saka kami mag-uusap. Kung hindi naging masaya ang araw niya, magpapatuloy siya sa ginagawa. At saka niya ako absentmindedly tatanungin ng “Bakit ba?”//Hindi ko siyempre palalampasin ang pagkakataon. Ready or not, ibubuhos ko ang litanya. //“Louie, matagal na naman nating pinag-uusapan ito. Gusto kong magtrabaho. Ayaw ko nang magka-baby. Hindi na kita mabibigyan ng anak na lalaki. Hindi na tayo nag-uusap. Sawa na ako sa kakahambing mo sa akin kay Jessica. Depressed ako palagi. Merong problema na hindi ko ma-explain pero alam kong nandoon. Alam ko na ayaw ko ng mga sitwasyong ganito.//Kung huhulaan ko ang reaksyon ni Louie sa aria kong ito, tatlo lang namang scenario ang pagpipilian ko.//Una, hindi na naman niya ako papansinin. Iisipin niyang may period ako, o nainis ako sa katulong o kinausap ako ni Mama o may bago na naman akong nabasang libro.//Ikalawa, maaaring kausapin niya ako, alu-aluin to make me feel better. Tapos, matatahimik na uli ang kalooban ko at maiisip kong mabait naman ang asawa ko

at bakit ko nga ba naisip na kailangan kong makipaghiwalay sa kaniya?  
//Ikatlo, maaaring magalit siya, sabihing “tigilan mo na nga lahat ng dramang yan.” Pagkatapos, bubuksan niya ang TV at masapawan ng basketball ang lahat ng mga hinaing ko. (116-117) (I am preparing in the same manner I prepared for an interview five years ago; I am rehearsing right now. My lines are running through my mind as I fold my clothes and put them in the luggage one by one. //I have already set aside the dress for Louie’s arrival. Red floral house dress. The opposite of the grey linen dress I wore for the interview. It’s a house dress since I am just in the house; floral because almost all my house dresses are floral; and it’s red because I feel that I need the fighting spirit for me to say all that I need to say.//What did those articles say about such separations? I have read many articles about “How to Catch the Man You Adore” and “How to Keep Your Man” and “How to Cope When a Man Leaves You”. But I have not read anything about “How to Tell Someone You’re Leaving Him”.//“Louie, let’s break up.”//This is the most direct way that came to mind. An opening and closing line rolled into one sentence...Of course, I also realize there is something wrong about this kind of approach. It’s as if it is my sole decision. As if Louie and I never discussed it. Maybe I should listen to his side even if my mind is made up about our separation.//“Louie, we have a problem.”//Louie would ask what the problem was. “What is it?” If he is in a good mood, he would sit on a chair or the bed (depending on which is closer to him), he would ask me to go near him and that is the time we would talk. If he had a bad day, he would continue with what he was doing, and then absentmindedly ask, “Why?”//Of course, I would not let this chance pass. Ready or not, I would pour out my litanies. //“Louie, we have discussed this before. I want to work. I don’t want to have a baby. I won’t be able to give you a son. We don’t talk anymore. I am tired of getting compared to Jessica. I am always depressed. There is a problem that I could not explain yet I know it’s there. I just know that I don’t like situations like this.//If I were to guess Louie’s reaction to my litanies, I can think of three possible scenarios to choose from.//First, he would ignore me, like always. He would think that I am menstruating, or that I am annoyed at the helper, or that my mom spoke to me, or I have just read a new book.//Secondly, he could talk to me and appease me to make me feel better. Then I would calm down and start to think that, after all,

my husband is a kind person so why did I ever think about separating from him? Third, he could get angry and say “stop all this drama”. Then, he would turn the TV on and all my aches would be drowned out by the basketball game he is watching.)

Both instances of contemplation expose the binary opposition that structures these two women’s relationship with Louie. Their thoughts on confrontation are framed by the cultural myth that confers rationality to men and irrationality to women. Male rationality in this context is exhibited through Louie’s deportment and manner of speaking, as imagined by Jessica and Sandra. Louie’s evasiveness and reluctance sit well with Barrios’ advice in writing the male character: “...kailangang may mysteryo naman ng kaunti. Bakit kaya siya masungit? May nangyari kaya sa kaniyang nakaraan? Itinatago lang ba niya ang kaniyang tunay na damdamin?” (Barrios 2001: 291) (...mystery is necessary, even just a little. Why is he ill-tempered? Is it because of his past? Is he merely concealing his true feelings?)

The deployment of masculine domination as a cultural myth in building the character of the male subject may be read as an anomaly especially when the novel claims to have feminist intents. Meanwhile, what Barrios does is to retain these patriarchal elements and expose them to the challenge of feminist myth-making. The myth-making involved in this context is limited to the female voice’s contemplative strategy that dispels her utter victimization. Thus, the female textual subject’s analysis of the situation does not come to the attention of the male textual subject, yet is made known to the reader (as in the case of Fely). Barrios’ postponement of the agency of the female textual subject (the actual practice of her contemplation) may be read as an instance of masculine domination. But then again, such an accusation invites what Bourdieu (2001) calls scholastic fallacy. He maintains that:

[a]lthough it is true that, even when it seems to be based on the brute force of weapons or money, recognition of domination always presupposes an act of knowledge, this does not imply that one is entitled to describe it in the language of consciousness, in an intellectualist and scholastic fallacy which...leads one to expect the liberation of women to come through the immediate effect of the ‘raising of consciousness,’ forgetting — for a lack of a dispositional theory of practices — the opacity and inertia that stem from the embedding of social structures in bodies. (40)

It is also interesting to note that the agency of the female textual subject is constrained by her circumstances. Compare, for instance, Jessica's 'hysterical' reaction to Louie and Sandra's quiet departure. The former's economic empowerment and intellectual independence allow her to confront Louie however inarticulately, as she herself says. The latter's status as a housewife can only permit her to leave the male space that she occupies after she has left her job and her apartment. The disposition of Sandra and Jessica sheds light on the "limitations and possibilities of thought or action that domination imposes on the oppressed" (Mathieu in Bourdieu 2001: 41).

Lisa, in *Kung Daratnan Pa Kitang Naghibintay*, expresses the same take on the experience of masculine domination:

Hindi kasi sa lahat ng panahon nakakahanap ang isang tao, lalo na ang isang babae, ng mga salita para sa gusto niyang sabihin. At sa pagkakataong ito, nagiging impatient ang mga kausap, lalo na ang mga lalaki. Hindi nila naiisip na may mga bagay na kung minsan mahirap sabihin dahil may kakulangan sa wika. (89) (People do not always find the words to express what they mean to say, especially women. In these occasions, the other person gets impatient, especially men. They do not understand that sometimes there are things that are hard to express because of language's inadequacies.)

This realization leads Lisa to postpone her decision to marry Tony:

"Tinatanong kita noong isang araw kung ano ang problema."//Hindi ko matantya si Tony. Hindi ko alam kung galit siya o hindi. "Walang problema. Mahal kita." Kaya lang, kailangan natin ng panahon para mag-isip. Iba ang 'mahal' at 'kasal agad.' Marami pa akong kailangang i-proseso sa sarili ko, Tony. At nahahirapan ako kapag nagiging impatient ka sa proseso ko. Dahil parang nagiging mali ang alam kong hindi naman mali//...Subukan natin uli, Tony. Pero dahan-dahan lang.//Gusto kong sa akin manggaling ito. Iyong alok na subukan namin ni Tony, na umaalis ako hindi dahil gusto kong i-give up ang relasyon. Natatakot lang ako at minsan ang takot, mas bida pa kaysa pag-ibig.//Pero syempre may emphasis doon sa mga salitang "dahan-dahan lang." Medyo nakakatawa nga kasi kung tutuusin, after twelve

years, kami pa ang nagdadahan-dahan. Parang contrasting pati sa impulsive nature ko.//Tumango si Tony. Pagkatapos, nag-last attempt pa uling magpatawa, nawili sa pagbibigay ng punchline: “Ikaw naman ang laging nagmamadali sa ating dalawa, e...”//Habang paakyat ako ng eroplano, iniisip ko, hindi naman malungkot ang mga paalaman dahil hindi naman lubos na nagpapaalam ang mga tao. (98-101) (“I asked you the other day what the problem was.”//I could not understand Tony. I do not know if he is angry or not. “There is no problem. I love you.” It’s just that we need more time to think. Love is not the same as marriage. I have many things to resolve with myself, Tony. And it does not help whenever you get impatient with me. Because you make it appear to be wrong what I know to be right.//...Let us start again, Tony. But we should take it slowly.//I want this to come from me. I’m leaving not because I want to give up the relationship.//I just get scared sometimes, and sometimes fear is more compelling than love.//Of course, there is emphasis on the words “take it slowly”. It’s funny when you think of it; it’s only after twelve years that we decided to take it slow. It seems so unlike my impulsive nature.//Tony nodded his head. Then, he attempted to inject some humor, enjoying the delivery of a punchline: “Between the two of us, it’s you who has the tendency to rush into things.”//While I was boarding the plane, I thought to myself, goodbyes are not so sad because people don’t say gooby completely.)

Despite himself, Tony expresses his willingness to wait for Lisa. This ending allows the female textual subject to challenge instances of masculine domination embodied in Tony’s self-righteous and domineering personality. Moreover, Lisa struggles to find the words to articulate her position vis-à-vis her pursuit of romantic love and independence.

Meanwhile, Fely ends up marrying her true love, Aaron. While Aaron fits into the stereotypical male who knows what is good for the woman he cares for, Fely’s decision to be with Aaron rather than with Rainier is an outright rejection of masculine domination. As Fely herself admits, “Iyong isa pang bagay na nagustuhan niya medyo nakakahiya. In love siya sa pangalan ni Rainier. Parang Prinsipe kasi” (11). (It’s embarrassing to admit another thing that attracted her to Rainier. She is in love with his name. It sounds princely.) Rainier is the embodiment of Fely’s fantasy of submission to the sexual division

of labor that eroticizes domination. In this context, Fely as the mail-order bride is an object that may climb upward by sleeping with power. Only a transnational union can gratify Fely's desire for money; this is the only viable path towards upward mobility, especially since cross-class marriages in a polarized society like the Philippines happens only in the movies. This explains the imperative of fashioning male characters as economically empowered:

Mahalaga ring mayaman ang bidang lalaki. Marami yatang nagagawa ang salapi. Maaari mo siyang gawing boss ng kumpanya kung saan nagtatrabaho ang bidang babae. Maaari rin namang magkaroon ng disaster sa buhay ng babae at ang lalaki ang sumagip sa kaniya sa pamamagitan ng kayamanan nito. Isa pa'y mas maraming maaring magandang tagpuan sa iyong mga eksena: mararangyang bahay; mga resthouse; mga paglalakbay sa iba't ibang bahagi ng daigdig. Bukod dito, may kotse pa silang nagagamit kaya may eksena ka rin sa loob ng Mercedes o BMW kaya (hindi talaga pwede ang Kia Pride). (Barrios 2001: 197) (It is important that the male lead character is rich. After all, money can accomplish many things. You can make him the boss of the company where the female character is working. With his wealth and influence, it is possible for the male lead character to rescue the female lead character in occasions of crisis and disaster. Besides, it is possible to have more elegant settings in your scenes: opulent mansions; resthouses; and travels around the world. Aside from these, you can use the male lead's car, a Mercedes or BMW [a Kia Pride just won't do], for a setting.)

Precisely, the rejection of masculine domination comes from the female textual subject while the male textual subjects remain passive and unchanging in terms of asserting the feminist elements in the plot.

Jessica, on the other hand, continues to live on her own:

May mga pagkakataong miss na miss ni Jessica si Louie. Hindi dahil hindi siya galit dito o dahil umaasa pa siyang babalikan siya nito. Nami-miss lang niya ito gaya ng pagka-miss ng lahat ng tao sa lahat ng tao, bagay o pook na naging mahalaga sa buhay nila. (110) (There were times when Jessica missed Louie so much. Not because she was not angry with him or she was hoping for their reconciliation. She missed

him in the same way people miss other people, things, or places that have been important parts of their lives.)

In this novel, the female textual subject is forced to come to terms with the violence inflicted upon her by the male textual subject. Jessica then begins to learn to confront her issues stemming from Louie's single-handed decision to leave her and be with another woman. However, the novel grants no redemption to Louie. Curiously, Louie, in *Ang Kwento ni Sandra*, grants Sandra what he never allowed Jessica while still with her. Louie follows Sandra to Baguio and attempts to communicate with her:

“Alam mo Louie kaya ako pumayag na nasa bahay lang, kasi, gusto kong maging opposite kay Jessica. Naisip ko kasi baka mawala ka rin sa akin, kapag nagpumilit akong magkaroon ng career.”//Kailangan kong ipaliwanag kay Louie kung bakit ako umalis. “Hindi ko yata kaya kapag iniwan mo ako. To a certain extent, kaya ako nagpapaalam, dahil gusto kong kung may aalis, ako iyon, hindi ikaw.”//Nakikinig si Louie na para bang alam niyang hindi madali sa akin ang magsalita dahil kahit ang dami-dami ko nang sinasabi, patuloy pa rin akong naghahanap ng mga salita.//Hinawakan ni Louie ang kamay ko. “Siguro, may pagkakataon na hindi ako naging mabuting tao kay Jessica o kahit na sa iyo. Siguro hindi kita laging pinapakinggan o iniintindi.” At nagsasalita si Louie na parang nangungumpisal, na para bang may kahinaan siyang kailangang aminin sa akin, para patunayang sinisikap niya akong maunawaan.//...Uuwi siguro kami bukas sa bahay. Siguro, mag-uusap kami uli, magpapalano ng mga bagay na kailangang gawin o baguhin, hindi ko pa tiyak kung ano talaga. Pero mag-uusap kami at lagi at lagi, maghahanap ako ng mga salita. (166-167) (“You know, Louie, I agreed to stay in the house because I wanted to be different from Jessica. It’s because I thought that I might lose you if I insisted on pursuing a career.”//I needed to explain to Louie why I left. “I might not be able to take it if you leave me. To a certain extent, the reason I am leaving is because if there is anyone who is leaving, it should be me and not you.” Louie listened as if he knew that, despite the many things I said, I was having a hard time finding the right words.//Louie held my hand. “Maybe there have been times when I was not a good person to Jessica or even to you. Maybe I have not been listening and understanding to you.” And Louie spoke as if he was in a confessional, as if he had to admit a weakness to me, to prove that he was trying to understand me.//... We might be home tomorrow. We might talk again, plan many things to do and change,

I really don't know what. But we will talk, and every time, I would continuously search for words.)

In this occasion, Louie, the masculine textual subject, challenges masculine domination by finally listening to Sandra and admitting his insensitivity as an error to be rectified. This realization on Louie's part would not have been possible with Jessica. This is because the strength of the structure of masculine domination predisposes individuals to seek their partners in terms of the principle of perpetuation of symbolic power relations. Sandra's decisive love for Louie may be read as a matrimonial strategy. Since masculine domination constitutes women as symbolic goods, it tends to seek its perpetuation through the sexual division of labor and a very strict division of symbolic power misrecognized as attributes of an ideal partner. As such, women generally prefer older and taller men whose station in society is higher than theirs.

Bourdieu explains further that:

differential socialization disposes men to love the games of power and women to love the men who play them, masculine charisma is partly the charm of power, the seduction that the possession of power exerts, as such, on bodies whose drives and desires are themselves politically socialized. Masculine domination is one of its strongest supports in the misrecognition which results from the application to the dominant of categories engendered in the very relationship of domination and which can lead to the extreme form of *amor fati* (love of the dominant and of his domination), a *libido dominantis* (desire for the dominant) which implies renunciation of personal exercise of *libido dominandi* (the desire to dominate). (79-80)

Along these lines, Louie's considerable transformation at the end of the novel may be read as a dynamic of permanence and change in the structure of masculine domination. On the one hand, Louie, on the level of subjectivity, escapes the trap of male privilege that warrants and normalizes his exercise of violence. His affective disposition is a result of Sandra's resistance to the fundamental principle of the symbolic organization of the sexual division of labor: the active male and the passive female. On the other hand, the prospect of change at the end of the novel does not eradicate masculine domination expressed in the dynamic of eroticized recognition of subordination and

domination, a condition that made their union possible in the first place.

### Knowing the Limits, Raising the Stakes

I began this study by posing the significance of reconstructing dominant representations of masculinity in the feminist challenge to patriarchy. I examined the relational construction of masculinity by analyzing the instances of masculine domination in the Rosas novels written by Joi Barrios. It was established that such problematization cannot be detached from the conditions of production of alternative romance novels.

The construction of masculinity in the light of a feminist position-taking has to balance itself with the market of symbolic goods where these alternative romance novels circulate. This explains the observation that Barrios' construction of masculinity in the actual novels, to some extent, coheres with her guidelines on constructing the male textual subject. These guidelines were written on the pretext of writing mainstream romance novels for mass production and distribution. Their mercenary orientation, as Barrios herself suggests, can only amplify commonsensical notions of love and sexualized/eroticized schemes of domination.

In reading the four novels, I have observed that the task of challenging dominant masculinity is primarily assigned to the female textual subject who later breaks away from her eroticized subordination. The uneven treatment of male and female characters in terms of their resistance to dominant patriarchal constructs may be explained by the crucial function of masculine domination in maintaining the sexual division of labor — a focal strategy in reproducing the dominant mode of production, which, in turn, sets the parameters for capitalist production in the cultural field.

It is also observed that among the four novels, only one ends happily — *Sintang Malapit Sintang Malayo*. *Ang Kwento ni Sandra* and *Kung Daratnan Pa Kitang Naghibintay* imply uncertainty in terms of the heterosexual union. Interestingly, both male textual subjects (Tony and Louie) are sensitized towards the end of the story. *Ang Kwento ni Jessica* ends on a sad yet optimistic note about a

woman who survives her husband's abandonment without having to be unhappy for the rest of her life.

Furthermore, Barrios' approach to writing the feminist romance novel also consists in a symptomatic exposition of masculine domination. This involves tackling mundane realities of domestic life, family rituals, and habits of male and female characters situated in various sites in the social space. Aimed at defamiliarizing the domestic, this approach establishes a break with our embeddedness in the social world that shapes our modes of thought about its 'givenness' and order. Barrios' lyrical construction and apparent reluctance towards decisive ruptures in the representations of masculinity and femininity highlight the structuring structure of masculine domination. After all, a break with the structure of masculine domination, embodied and reproduced in men and women, as well as in institutions, entails the restructuring of the whole order of capital which, in the first place, creates the conditions of possibility in the production of ideas objectified in cultural texts such as the romance novel.

The site of struggle opened up by the Rosas Series consists of a reassessment of the taken-for-granted inscription of femininity and masculinity. The labor of socialization involved in reading these alternative feminist romance novels by Joi Barrios is one that challenges feminine stereotypes. But such an endeavor entails the pursuit of one of feminism's logical conclusions, i.e., to create a disruption in the sexual division of labor that primarily defines dominant modes of femininity and masculinity. The relational character of domination necessitates a re-imagination not only of women's place but also of men's privileged position.

Barrios' portrayal of the hidden constants of masculine domination (refer to her guidelines on how to construct the male textual subject) may also be read as an intervention into and a critique of a patriarchal culture in its material and symbolic forms. The masculine habitus in Barrios' texts is informed by a society's conditions of economic production and ideological reproduction. As Bourdieu (2001: 33) points out, "the precedence universally accorded to men is affirmed in the objectivity of the social structures and productive and reproductive activities, based on a sexual division of labour of biological and social reproduction which gives better part to men, and also in the schemes immanent in everyone's habitus". He adds further that "the material and symbolic power relation between the

sexes...[and] the principle of perpetuation of this relationship of domination does not truly reside (or, at least not principally) in one of the visible sites in which it is exercised – in other words, within the domestic sphere, on which some feminist debate has concentrated its attention – but in agencies such as the school or state” (4). Needless to say, if the mass media is another site where “principles of domination go on to be exercised within even the most private universe, [such as the act of reading romance novels] ... then a vast field of action is opened up for feminist struggles...” (Barrios 2001: 4).

At best, Barrios, for the Rosas Series, came out with novels that explored and reconstructed masculinity in terms of its hidden constants or inherited forms. Meanwhile, the feminist writer bell hooks (1984: 81) imagines a time and place “[w]hen men show a willingness to assume equal responsibility in the feminist struggle, performing whatever tasks necessary, [and] women should affirm their revolutionary world by acknowledging them as comrades”. The same vision is needed in challenging dominant masculinities in the realm of cultural production.

The aforementioned moments of battle against masculine domination demonstrated in the bold endings and tactics of defamiliarization in the Rosas romance novels written by Barrios, in particular, signals affirmation of symbolic goods as a “two faced reality, a commodity and a symbolic object” (Bourdieu 1993: 114). This characteristic of symbolic goods, as Bourdieu (1993: 114) maintains, obtains from “[t]he development in the system of cultural production accompanied by a process of differentiation generated by the diversity of publics at which the different categories producers aim their products”.

However, this autonomization of the writer-intellectual and the Rosas’ particular position-taking in the field of cultural production is simply formal. Anvil’s attempt at placing its stakes on culture, thereby gaining cultural distinction and legitimacy in exploring a restricted field of cultural production, as opposed to pursuing the logic of economic scarcity that ties any enterprise to the order of orthodoxy, “constitutes no more than the condition of their submission to the laws of the market of symbolic goods, that is to a form of demand, that lags behind supply [capacity] of the commodity” (Bourdieu 1993: 114). Thus, after a year, it is the sales figures of the Rosas series and not its position-taking (producing and selling feminist alternative romance

novels) based on a formulated belief — the need “to transform the romance novel into a vehicle for propagating feminist messages” (Encanto 1996: 218) — that determines, in the last instance, its life-span in the market. Therefore, the antinomies in Barrios’ construction of male and female textual subjects in the light of a feminist position-taking formulated by her publisher may be explained by the gap between a formulated belief and its attendant position-taking in the field of cultural production. This gap, which accounts for the limits of practice (the production of alternative feminist romance novels), is precisely the strict boundaries set by capitalist book-production on creativity and transgression.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In her dissertation, Encanto (1996: 180-181) documents the sales and circulation of the Rosas Series: “The series was launched in June 1991, over 50 titles within a print run of 5000 copies each have been published. Rosas novels are sold at P30, and packaged to resemble the highly popular paperback commercial romances...Based on an ocular inspection conducted by marketing agents of Anvil Publishers and sales reports, readers consist of mainly middle-class female readers who are from urban areas and are mostly students, housewives, office personnel like secretaries and clerks aged 20 and above although Rosas novels were also read by *masahistas*, *despatsadoras*, *lavanderas*, market vendors and overseas workers. They can be rented like the *komiks* in certain provinces like Baguio, the Southern Tagalog region, and Iloilo, or borrowed from book clubs. The Rosas novels seem to be more popular in the urban areas... The sales figures: In 1991, the company sold a total of 43,377 copies which earned a total of P1.1 million or 6% of the annual trade sales.” On the average, publishers of romance novels are able to sell from 5,000-20,000 monthly (Barrios 2001). This shows that the annual sales figure of Anvil Publishing is rather low compared to the average sales figure of the publishers of mainstream romance novels.

<sup>2</sup> A popular market in Quezon City.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu (1980: 53) defines the *habitus* as a “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles that generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the

operations necessary in order to attain them”.

- <sup>4</sup> This refers to the musings of the narrator. The term “musing” however, connotes triviality and cannot give justice to the implications of self-analysis put forward by the text.

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## Napoleon Quincé at ang Malisya sa Pagtikim ng Kinse Años

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*“Nakatikim ka na ba ng kinse años?” (Have you ever tasted a 15-year old?) is a question from a billboard advertisement of Napoleon Quincé that triggered numerous protests from women’s and children’s groups from February to April 2004. This investigative report analyzes the arguments for and against the billboard advertisement and contextualizes the issues raised vis-à-vis the status of women and children in society. The report observes that the advertisement’s double meaning is quite apparent despite Destileria Limtuaco’s claims to the contrary. It is exploitative not just of women but also of children, particularly 15-year old girls. The advertisement reflects patriarchy in society and sexism in liquor advertisements. It is proof of how businesses are wont to exploit women and children just to sell their products.*

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### Patalastas ng Napoleon Quincé: Pagtikim sa Masamang Panlasa?

Sa isang komunidad sa Pasig, may isang sampung taong gulang na babae na kinaladkad sa loob ng isang sasakyan noong Marso 2004. Bagamat hindi siya ginahasa, hinipuan naman siya ng tatlong kalalakihan. Makalipas ang ilang sandali, pinalabas siya ng sasakyan pero ang pasaring ng isa sa mga lalaki sa kaniya, “hindi pa kasi kami nakakatikim ng kinse años”.

Idiniin ni Cristina Palabay, pangkalahatang kalihim ng Gabriela Women’s Party (GWP), na ang nangyari ay malinaw na ebidensya ng negatibong epekto ng billboard ng Destileria Limtuaco sa bago nitong produktong Napoleon Quincé brandy.

Ang billboard ay may larawan ng alak na “Napoleon Brandy (Fifteen Years Old)” sa kanan. Nakasulat naman sa kaliwa, sa malalaking letra, ang tanong na “Nakatikim ka na ba ng kinse años?” Sa ilalim nito’y may maliit na logo ng produkto at nakasulat ang pangalang “Napoleon Quincé”. (Tingnan ang **Figure 1**) Mula noong Pebrero hanggang katapusan ng Abril 2004, nakita ito sa mga estratehikong lugar ng National Capitol Region (NCR) tulad ng Roxas Boulevard at interseksyon ng EDSA at Timog Avenue.