

# Research Paper

“Mayor of the Roses” is the title story of the book with the same name, written by Marianne Villanueva, the Philippine writer. The story depicts a cruel rape and the double killing of a young girl and her boyfriend in a small town Calauan. The discourse is made in chaotic way whereas one paragraph describes the events of the present, the next paragraph refers to the past, and then again to the present. The persona of the story is the narrator herself; she is telling her reminiscences of the time she was studying at college. Probably, the reason for which the order of the events is not smooth is that the narrator is recollecting the occasions chaotically. There is almost nothing esthetic and lyrical in the narrative since the story is full of negative feelings and tales. It reproduces the politics of the Philippine’s town from the point of view of the persona. Women in the Philippine’s province were unprotected and disregarded due to the ruling of the double-faced and cruel government.

## Discussion

***The First Idea.*** The first idea of the story is to provide the readers with the information about the cruelty and women’s defenselessness in the country of the Philippines. The narration is based on the real events, and the author tries to feel the emotions herself, making the audience realize her sorrow and pain. She begins her story with the description of the country where she was raised. The country is associated with the smell of “raw meat, blood, and rotting garbage, of human sweat”. The smell seems to be not pleasant, rather offensive. These first cause the negative associations of the Philippine’s provinces, which are separated from the society.

The next step in the narration is the author’s memory about her mother’s friend, who had her clothes stolen. It is the hint about the further events, which are

related to more significant crime. Marianne's mother denies these memories, and the author reviews everything, asking herself a question, "So where did this story come from?". While reading this question, the readers wonder whether the narration is real or it is the author's imagination. The story is full of such puzzles and hints, and every reader can interpret them differently.

Considering the following words, it is clear that the family of the author came to Philippines from America. Marianne tells, "My family used to go to buy [...] milk that tasted as close to American milk as my mother could find in the Philippines". It means that the author is used to know the taste of American milk because she lives there and comes to the Philippines to visit her relatives. She continues telling her story, stating that the offense was committed near the University of Los Baños, where a young queen was gang-raped by seven men ten years ago. The women (the mother and grandmother of Marianne) were discussing that horrible event during the dinner. This occasion is the subject of the narration.

The author keeps telling about the first day of the court. She uses prolepsis to intrigue the readers and to show them further actions before the main topic. Marianne describes her first feelings about the young queen's photo in the newspaper, stating that she was not as pretty as she had expected. Further, she describes men, and they seem ugly and disgusting, with "secretive eyes" and "bellies that hung over the cinched belts". Probably, the description is the reflection of the author's attitude to men living in that province. They were mysterious and terrible for her.

***Further Observations.*** The portraying of the Mayor, "the chief perpetrator", is rather short – "a caricature [...] wearing a rug on his head". Maybe, the author imagined him as an antagonist from a cartoon or a comic book, or he resembles a picture from the newspaper; therefore, she called him "caricature." It is also possible that he was so cruel and frightful that the narrator wanted him to look unreal. In any case, one can feel a note of anger and horror in the persona's voice. On the other hand, her voice is not trembling or frightened, rather curious. At

the end of the story, she will write about the Mayor, using simile and metaphor, “shock of hair that looked like a rug, those pig eyes”. The narrator compares him with an animal, which is a pig. The pig symbolizes good luck, strength, and prosperity; lamentably enough, but the Mayor was rich, successful, and strong.

Further, the author states that she came to the courtroom as an observer, “because of the stories”. She heard some rumors and wanted to prove that they are true. She does not participate in the events; she just retells them in a way she understands these occasions. In addition, the story narrates that the friends of Mayor, the chief of police and Mayor’s nephew, were choosing the gift for his fiftieth anniversary. The author shows that those men found the event funny. They laughed and agreed to the idea to making a present of a young beauty queen to Mayor. Their behavior was inhuman. It is suggested that they had problems with females in their childhood. Healthy and adequate people could not behave in such a way. However, all of did it. It is the hint to think about their sanity. Probably, those men were injured by some women or were violated and raped. It may be also suggested that they just hated females to such extent that they wanted to take vengeance on them. One more reason is that some of those men were mentally abnormal persons. Nevertheless, all of them had problems with the brain. Moreover, they knew that they would avoid punishment because the policemen were supporting them.

The next paragraphs describe the act of rape. Marianne uses the word ‘numbers’ several times. The numbers are important here. The girl was raped by seven men; the Mayor had three daughters; he was a lord of “a numbers game”; he listened to the numerology chart; the Virgin Mary gave him the lucky number in his dream. The number ‘seven’ is very symbolic. There are seven days in a week; people say, ‘in the seventh heaven’; a rainbow has seven colors; in Australia, for example, people say, ‘to throw a seven’, which means ‘to die’. There are also many other meanings, but in the context of the story “Mayor of the Roses”, this number may symbolize the end of life for the girl and her transformation to another life. This number is not happy but fatal for her.

***Details in the Story.*** Marianne Villanueva expresses consideration regarding the details. She describes the act of rape in details, so that it is difficult to read without emotions. It makes the readers feel pity and deep sympathy to the girl and her family; at the same time, the Mayor and his friends are perceived as hateful and revolting. This is the successful device of the author that makes the auditory deeply penetrate her story and feel every emotion of pain and fear. However, people who have weak psychological state cannot read such narrations; therefore, the audience is limited. Nevertheless, those who have read the title story of the book *Mayor of the Roses* will be fascinated and concerned while reading the whole book. The goal of every writer is to arouse interest in his or her readers, and Marianne succeeds to reach this aim.

After representing the cruel events, the author skips to the description of The Mayor's life and family. As it has appeared, he has a wife and three daughters. Moreover, his wife, Fe, defends him in the courtroom telling that he spent with her that fateful night. Different explanations can be expressed towards such behavior. Perhaps, she loved her husband and wanted to protect him; or, maybe, she was caring about their daughters and did not want them to lose their father. It is more likely that she was also afraid of him. It can be explained in the following way: Fe knew about her husband's actions; however, he could threaten her, and she had to support him and accept the situation. Nevertheless, these are only suppositions and one more hint to consider. Probably, the Filipinos highly appreciated their family values whereas they did not care about the other people and events. If it is so, the issue of cultural identity may arise, and this is an important concept in the story. It underlines the importance of the family unity regardless of any problems.

In the sequel, the narrator discloses the man who has betrayed the Mayor. She writes that it was the driver. During that awful night, he was there and had also a chance to rape that girl, but he refused, "thinking about his two little girls at home". While reading these lines, there is only one wish, which is to ask a question why he did not stop them. There are other things to consider: was he arrested or

convicted for implication? Could he prevent this? Why did he agree to drive the car for them? All these questions seem to have no responses; the answers depend on the readers' imagination, and this is another puzzle for them.

Continuing her story, the author tells about her first meeting with the personages in the courtroom. The narrator accented that she had to see them and convinced herself that occasions were real. In addition, Marianne is trying to persuade the readers because not everyone could believe her. Further, she tells that she sometimes could not realize who she was. The storyteller writes that she was on vacation, but she could think of nothing except the girl. Due to the author's revelation, the readers review the story and believe that it was real.

The narration continues with the analepsis (flashback) – it describes the savage events in more details. It returns the readers to that horrible incident and forces them to experience the negative feelings again. The further details confirm the permissiveness of the police. The police guards were those who kidnapped the girl and killed her boyfriend, Paolo. The author depicts the girl's feelings at that moment: she was frightened but she wanted to live. At that time, the girl thought, "So it's true, all those stories about the Mayor". It means that such situation was not a single one, and he had also behaved in the same way in the past. Further, the readers realize that "he was the one who had put the crown on her head". He was a double-faced person – a model family man and a furious animal. It may reflect the problem of the Philippine's society, where double-faced and contradictory authorities were ruling the town. They seemed to be fair in the public and changed into beasts in private life.

After all those sufferings and humiliations, the girl still wanted to live. However, she could not survive because she was shot directly. This act of violence is described in the smallest details, and a simple person could not imagine that there is such a cruelty. Analyzing the hostile behavior of the men, the following thought arises in mind. Probably, that was the reason for which people migrated from the Philippines because they were seeking protection and safety, which



they could not obtain there, in their native country. Marianne Villanueva was one of them. She migrated to the USA and came back to the Philippines to visit her mother and spend her vacation. She was not a part of that life anymore; she was just a spectator.

One more mysterious detail is that the author sees a mystery girl in the courtroom. She tells that no one else could see her, and that her hands, “with their faint tracery of blue veins, looked very familiar”. It is possible that she saw the ghost of that girl, or just thought that she saw it. It may be a symbol of the transition to another life as well as the warning that the offenders should be punished; otherwise, the soul of the victim will not find peace.

The story ends with the depiction of the Mayor, sitting in a bathtub in jail and smiling. “Bath water was sprinkled with rose petals provided by his loving wife, Fe, the new Mayor of Calauan”. The last sentence cancels the previous surmises about their relations and confirms that Fe loved her husband and wanted to preserve their family. There is only one thing which is threatening, that is the Mayor was happy even in jail. He was not suffering; he did not understand his mistakes, which means that he did not change. Moreover, his wife assumed the reins of the government and continued his dirty business.

## Conclusion

In the short story “Mayor of the Roses”, Marianne Villanueva describes the problem of the Philippine’s society on the example of one horrible event that happened in the small town, Calauan, a decade ago. That story deeply penetrates the readers and makes them feel sorrow and pain of defenseless women, who suffered from the horrible cruelty. Men have strength and power, they behave as they want. However, the author does not consider all men equal; she depicts only the Mayor and his friends. On the other hand, the Mayor is the

chief of the town, and he is an example for imitation. His duplicity is observed in the narration, where he is a father of a family and a cruel offender at the same time. He remains happy even in jail, and this is a symbol of the social impunity. The Mayor is arrested, but he lives in good conditions, taking a bath with roses' petals.

The episode of terrible rape and double killing symbolizes the situation in the Philippine's provinces in general. It may be the reason for which so many people, especially women, seek protection in other countries. Therefore, there are many emigrants, including the author herself. She was not a victim of any incident; however, she has heard different horrible stories, and this one was the confirmation of the rumors. Marianne Villanueva did not want to be present in the courtroom at that time, but she had to evaluate the situation. Moreover, that experience helped her to write a book of eighteen stories that are concerned with the Philippines and women who live there. "Mayor of the Roses" is the first and the most shocking story that will impress every reader.