

Literature as a Mirror: Exploring Disparities in the Educational System through Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods*

Sean Andrex G. Martinez^{1*}, Shun Nori A. Relente², Sheena Mae B. Baclayon³, Lito L. Diones⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines

Abstract: This study examines the disparity within the educational system in Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods*; specifically, it engages in plot, characters, and theme. This study uses qualitative methods, particularly discourse analysis. This assumption is supported by Karl Marx's Class Struggle Theory and Marxist Criticism Theory. The disparities within the educational system present in the plot are administrative discrepancy, financial sacrifices, administrative uncertainty, farce, disillusionment, and hierarchy of positions. Neglect, inequality, privilege, and cynicism are the disparities within the educational system shown in the characters. The themes are positional gap, inadequate support, moral decay, and educational struggle. As revealed in the findings of this study, it is concluded that Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods* shows disparities within the educational system. Based on the findings and conclusion, future research recommendations are offered. First, analyzing characters in *The Visitation of the Gods* through psychological theories like Freudian analysis or Erikson's stages could reveal their intricate motivations and behaviors, unraveling the tension between societal pressures and personal desires. Second, examining the socio-political backdrop of the Philippine educational system depicted in the story may unveil inherent disparities. Critical lenses like post-colonialism or critical race could illuminate power dynamics and structural inequalities within the system. Finally, there are many study opportunities when examining institutional authority corruption and disillusionment, especially in the context of school bureaucracy. Discourse analysis and ethnographic study are two techniques that may be used to reveal how these themes appear in actual educational contexts.

Keywords: education, disparity, corruption, hierarchy, administration.

1. Introduction

Literature consists of creative and intellectual works that express thoughts, feelings, and experiences through language (Hassan, 2023). A short story is a brief piece of fiction that allows for storytelling experimentation and diversity by concentrating on a single or series of connected occurrences. Engaging with literary works enhances understanding complex emotions, empathy, and critical thinking (Hassan, 2023). Philippine literature is a vibrant reflection of the nation's culture and history, showcasing diverse traditions influenced by the country's unique experiences. It demonstrates the effects of

colonialism and the changing social dynamics while serving as a monument to the tenacity and inventiveness of the Filipino people (Hodges, n.d.). Philippine literature reflects the country's historical development and rich cultural legacy through its many literary works.

Gilda Cordero-Fernando, a renowned Filipino writer and cultural icon, has significantly contributed to Philippine literature, with *The Visitation of the Gods* as one of her notable works (Zialcita, 2021). This short story, set in a Philippine public school, explores themes of discrimination and inequality within the educational system. By examining these issues, this research aims to critically analyze how literature portrays and reflects pressing societal concerns.

The essence of Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods* is highly significant as is still evident in today's generation. Previous studies about this literary story show how equality is difficult to achieve. People in positions of authority tend to get more attention than those of the minority. The research explored the impact of the hierarchy of powers (Solis, 2023). Thus, this study intends to close the knowledge gap by exploring and advancing our understanding of the societal problems afflicting educational institutions and emphasizing the literature's ability to help address these problems.

The plot of the narrative seeks to unravel how it mirrors real-world educational disparities. The objective is to analyze the storyline for elements that correspond with the genuine challenges and inequities faced by educators in educational systems. By doing so, the researchers aim to provide insight into the potential impact of literature in reflecting and addressing pressing societal concerns.

The Philippines faces challenges in its education system, including overcrowded classrooms, teachers instructing outside their expertise, and low-quality instruction. The study suggests reevaluating educator hiring policies and catering to stakeholders' needs to enhance the quality of education (Gumarang, 2021). The study also highlights the need to analyze inequality at the subnational level, as overall national reductions may mask significant disparities within specific regions or social groups (McDoom et al., 2019). Despite the Department of Education's (DepEd) implementation of anti-

*Corresponding author: seanzmartinez404@gmail.com

discrimination laws, many populations experience indirect prejudice. DOLE guidelines aim to raise mental health awareness and reduce stigma; Filipinos continue to face discrimination and stigma, including age-based bias, in private companies despite existing laws prohibiting such policies (Almeda & Ballesteros, 2021).

According to research by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), if high-quality education is still out of reach for low-income Filipinos, educational inequities may get worse. The study discovered that family wealth significantly impacts educational quality, impeding the function of the educational system as a social equalizer (PIDS, 2022). The Philippines has several challenges, such as insufficient funding, a lack of qualified teachers, an out-of-date curriculum, and inadequate infrastructure, which contribute to high illiteracy rates, few career opportunities, and a growing skills gap (Pacay, 2020). It is imperative to adopt a comprehensive strategy that includes expanding employment possibilities, improving social services, promoting education and skill development, and allocating resources for education (Bai, 2023).

in historical materialism, to examine how literature reflects and influences societal structures, mainly through themes of class struggle, commodification, and alienation. This approach sees literature as a product of its historical context, mirroring the power dynamics between social classes (Kulkarni, 2024). Complementary theories like Feminist criticism, Historicism, Cultural studies, and Postcolonial theory further enhance the analysis by addressing how literature interacts with gender, culture, and colonialism, ultimately providing a comprehensive view of literature's role within society (Brewton, n.d.).

This study investigates the disparity within the educational system in Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods* in terms of plot, characters and themes.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study uses qualitative methods, specifically discourse analysis, that examines people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions. It focuses on meaning, perspectives, and motivations rather than cause and effect (Pathak et al., 2013). Discourse analysis examines language use in social contexts to understand how communication shapes societal norms and power structures (Pedada, 2024). The methodology provides a thorough analysis and critical observation of Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods*, allowing for a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of non-statistical data. This approach supports the study's goal of disseminating information supporting the primary issue and its sub-problems.

B. Source of Data

The primary data for this study is from Scribd, specifically Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods*, which is eight pages long and copyrighted under an Attribution Non-Commercial (BY-NC) license. Secondary sources include e-resources, articles, blogs, websites, theses, and dissertations.

C. Data-gathering Procedure

This study follows four phases: Plot, Characters, and Theme.

1) Phase 1. Plot

This phase evaluates the plot using Marxist Criticism Theory and Freytag's Pyramid, a variation of Aristotle's plot structure. The analysis covers the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement, identifying scenes and lines that highlight disparities in the educational system. This phase uses a table that contains the elements of plot, lines, meaning, and disparity within the educational system.

2) Phase 2. Characters

The second phase focuses on the characters' characterization and how they reflect differences. The character's discrepancies are examined using Marx's Class Struggle Theory. This stage utilizes a table labeled Characters, Characterization, Textual Evidence, Marx's Class Struggle Theory, and Disparity within the Educational System.

3) Phase 3. Theme

In the third phase, it analyzes the theme using Karl Marx's Class Struggle Theory, contextualizing it through lines and dialogues from the story. A table presents the following data:



Fig. 1. Schematic presentation of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

Karl Marx's Class Struggle Theory is the first theoretical approach used in this study. It emphasizes the division of society—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—highlighting the tensions that arise from their conflicting economic interests (McLellan et al., 2024). To enrich this analysis, the study incorporates Intersectional Theory, Conflict Theory, and Neo-Marxism, which acknowledge the complexities of inequality by considering the intersections of race, gender, class, and other social identities (Bohrer, 2024). These perspectives deepen the understanding of societal power dynamics and the multifaceted nature of class struggles.

In addition, Marxist Literary Criticism is applied, grounded

Theme, Textual Evidence, Marx's Class Struggle Theory, and Disparity within the Educational System.

4) Phase 4. Creative Write-back

The final phase involves writing an essay with facts from the short story. This is a creative write-back in response to the literary work, expressing the researchers' interpretation.

This study adheres to legal norms related to intellectual property, ensuring compliance with regulations governing trademarks and copyright, as there is no infringement involved in accessing and utilizing the mentioned literary work.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the data to address the study's subproblems, as facilitated by the proposed literary method, and provides an extensive analysis and discussion of the findings of the study.

A. Plot Analysis

Table 1 shows the plot analyzed through Marxist Criticism Theory and using Freytag's modification of Aristotle's plot structure called Freytag's Pyramid. This phase uses scenes and lines extracted from the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement of the short story studied.

The story begins at Pugad Lawin High School, where the principal receives a letter from a sleepy janitor, announcing the annual visitation by school administrators, which would be conducted for inspection and evaluation purposes in line 1-3. The portrayal of a janitor in educational settings often reflects social class dynamics. As a lower-class figure, the janitor symbolizes the imbalance of power within the system. This is evident in the informal use of janitors for communication, highlighting the unequal distribution of resources and influence. As Marxist Criticism suggests, this reflects the systemic hierarchy where those in power hold decision-making authority while others are relegated to subordinate roles; characters in literature often serve as representations of broader social issues, such as class struggles and power dynamics' (Texas A&M University, 2023). The janitor's role in delivering the letter highlights the commodification of labor in education. Marxist theory criticizes the exploitation of undervalued workers within institutional hierarchies. The pressure to maintain appearances for visitors reveals the focus on external impressions rather than the well-being of the workers (Sun, 2023). Furthermore, as noted in a guide on plot analysis, 'the actions and roles of characters often underscore the thematic concerns of the narrative, such as social inequality and exploitation' (Serna, 2023)."

In line 18, The flagpole had been reinforced with cement, and

the old gate had been painted white. Focusing on physical improvements like the flagpole and gate symbolizes an attempt to mask deeper issues and economic inequalities. This highlights a tendency to prioritize appearances, especially when facing scrutiny. As noted in a guide on analyzing novels and short stories, 'physical settings and objects often serve as symbols for deeper societal issues and conflicts' (Texas A&M University, 2023).

The following lines are all about teachers being grouped to do tasks, as in Line 29. The division of the teaching staff into groups reflects a hierarchical structure, which, when viewed through a Marxist lens, highlights class distinctions among the staff. The first group being relegated to the kitchen to prepare a varied menu underscores their subordinate role within this hierarchy (Sun, 2023).

In lines 29 - 33, the first group, led by Mrs. Divinagracia, was tasked with preparing the feast. The menu included various dishes, including a large pig, soup, embutido, chicken salad, fish, meatloaf, dessert, and ice cream. The cost was deducted from the teachers' salaries. The requirement for teachers to fund a lavish menu for a visit highlights the unfair financial burden placed on them. Despite their financial struggles, teachers are expected to contribute to creating an impressive impression, even if it means sacrificing their well-being. As noted in a guide on storytelling and plot analysis, 'the financial and emotional burdens placed on characters often reflect broader societal issues and inequalities (Adela, 2020). This situation underscores the systemic exploitation within educational institutions, where the well-being of staff is often overlooked in favor of maintaining appearances.

In the following lines 37 - 39, Mr. Olbes, the principal, emphasized the importance of creating a positive impression during the visitation. He reminded the teachers that their cooperation would be noted in their performance evaluations. Analyzing novels and short stories, 'characters often reflect broader societal issues, such as economic vulnerabilities and power dynamics' (Texas A&M University, 2023). Teachers are pressured to sacrifice their resources to create a favorable impression for visitors, which could affect their evaluations. This highlights the exploitation of their economic vulnerabilities. The delegation of tasks to students further demonstrates the bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the system (Hill, 2019).

In line 44, The teachers in Group Two delegated the task of procuring bedding and dishes to their students, who borrowed items from their neighbors' homes. This line shows class struggle among teachers as responsibilities are shifted to

Table 1
Plot analysis

Elements of the Plot	Scene	Lines	Disparity within the Educational System
Exposition	Visitation Preparation	1 - 3	Administrative Discrepancy
Rising Action	Visitation Preparation	18	Hierarchical Division Strife &
		29 - 33	Financial Sacrifices
		33 - 36	Administrative Uncertainty
		37 - 39	
		44	
Climax	Supper and Inspection	231 - 276	Farce
Falling Action	Social Hour	277 - 302	Discovery of Disillusionment
Denouement	Departure and Aftermath	318 - 322	Hierarchy of Positions

students, revealing hierarchical disparities (Irwin *et al.*, 2024). Group Two was still determining the sleeping preferences of the division heads. The uncertainty about division heads' sleeping preferences highlights a power dynamic and reinforces the class struggle.

In lines 231 - 232, Mr. Sawit followed Miss Noel to the kitchen and commented on her strong-willed personality. He expressed skepticism about the principal's assessment. The narrative reveals significant gaps and social divisions, as Miss Noel and Mr. Sawit's exchange highlights the constraints imposed on educators by authoritative figures and their expectations for conformity. The hierarchical dynamics and social divisions within educational settings constrain educators and enforce conformity (Irwin *et al.*, 2024).

Moving on, in the lines 239 - 242 Miss Noel argued that the school's preparations for the visitation were obvious and insincere. She suggested that the visitors were not observing the school's true nature. The narrative criticizes the superficial efforts to impress visitors, highlighting the disconnect between appearances and the realities of teaching. This reflects Marxist theory, where those in power use illusions to maintain control and enforce conformity. This also shows how social support and perceived stress can mediate mental health outcomes, emphasizing the importance of genuine interactions over superficial appearances (Acoba, 2024). Analyzing the plot and the characters' motivations can reveal deeper insights into these themes, as plot analysis helps to uncover the underlying messages and critiques within a story (Donovan, 2022).

Furthermore, In lines 246 - 248, Miss Noel responded that one of the visitors had commented that the school's lechon could be improved and that the food provided to students should be more generous. Her response highlights systemic issues in education by critiquing the focus on superficial elements like lechon (roasted pig) and pabaon (provisions) for efficiency ratings. It shows how materialistic considerations often overshadow the quality of teaching. This critique demands transformative change in evaluating educational success (Acoba, 2024; Stringer, 2024). Analyzing a short story involves understanding how different elements contribute to its overall meaning, including the critique of societal norms and expectations (Docimo & Littlehale, 2021)

As the story goes, In lines 257 - 259, Miss Noel expressed frustration with the educational system, stating that her practical teaching efforts were not appreciated. She criticized the emphasis on conformity and favoritism, claiming it hindered actual teaching and learning. Reflecting on five years of teaching, Miss Noel expressed disappointment in falling short of expectations despite adhering to her personal beliefs. They criticize the educational system for valuing conformity and political maneuvering over genuine teaching competence, where catering to authority precedes pedagogical skills (Sun, 2023).

Mr. Sawit throws his cigar out the window and cynically remarks on Miss Noel's youthful idealism, cautioning her that she will eventually learn through experience. This can be seen in lines 260 - 266, where Mr. Sawit's warning to Miss Noel highlights the tension between idealism and pragmatism in

education. This familiar dynamic emphasizes the challenges faced by new teachers as they navigate established norms. According to research, novice teachers often encounter significant challenges as they transition from their idealistic views to the practical realities of the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2020). Such challenges are frequently rooted in the conflict between their educational philosophies and the entrenched practices within schools.

The exchange showcases the power dynamics within educational institutions. This can be seen in lines 270 - 276, where Mr. Sawit warns Miss Noel about the potential consequences of her idealism, offering her support in exchange for compliance and silence. Mr. Sawit, an authority figure, uses coercion to maintain control. His offer of assistance reveals the prevalence of favoritism and the pressure to conform, showing broader societal issues of corruption and ethical dilemmas within hierarchical systems (Denisova-Schmidt, 2023), which discusses how corruption and lack of academic integrity are pervasive issues in higher education, affecting both faculty and students.

Miss Noel reflects on the disillusionment experienced by many dedicated teachers, particularly women, who continue teaching despite systemic unfairness in lines 269 - 269. It captures the frustration of teachers who feel undervalued and trapped by systemic challenges. This reflects the broader issue of inequality in education, particularly for women (Glendinning *et al.*, 2024), which highlights the ongoing challenges of maintaining ethics and integrity in educational institutions, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyzing the plot and the characters' motivations can reveal deeper insights into these themes, as plot analysis helps to uncover the underlying messages and critiques within a story (Bunting, Ruthanne & Reid, 2019)

Mr. Sawit reminds Miss Noel of the upcoming reclassification, warning her about potential repercussions for insubordination while offering his support if she conforms. The threat of reclassification and discipline emphasizes the vulnerability of educators who defy authority. Mr. Sawit's conditional support illustrates the manipulative power relationships within institutions, displaying the conflict between personal integrity and a system rife with favoritism and nepotism. Power relationships and institutional favoritism challenge educators, affecting their professional experiences and ethical decision-making (Veinhardt & Bendaraviciene, 2022).

Miss Noel, stunned, silently questions whether her years of dedication have been wasted. This can be seen in line 277, where Miss Noel's silence and introspection showcase the emotional toll of systemic inequalities on dedicated educators. This moment reflects the broader issue of educational inequity and its impact on those striving to effect change despite numerous challenges (Schmelkes, 2020).

Her tears and the repetition of her thoughts underscore her deep regret, serving as a critique of societal pressures and systemic challenges that often force individuals, particularly women, to choose between personal fulfillment and professional success. In line 278, Miss Noel reflects on the

personal sacrifices she made for her career, now questioning their value as she recalls the missed opportunities and the emotional toll of her dedication. Women in male-dominated fields often experience marginalization and emotional strain, leading to significant personal and professional sacrifices. Their study emphasizes the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the need for resilience to adverse negative career outcomes (Patrick, 2023).

When Miss Noel realizes how little her efforts have accomplished, she becomes highly frustrated with Mr. Sawit's worthless leadership. Her rhetorical queries demonstrate her dissatisfaction with a system that permits ineptitude to ascend to power and convey a frantic desire for explanation. This moment critiques the broader systemic failures that leave dedicated professionals like her disheartened and questioning the value of their hard work. Similarly, plot analyses have shown how conflict and climax within a story emphasize characters' struggles with societal flaws, mirroring Miss Noel's confrontation with Mr. Sawit as a critique of systemic failure (Putri & Malini, 2024).

Mr. Sawit dismisses the importance of intellect in education, instead emphasizing social skills and condescendingly undermines Miss Noel's values by mocking her idealism and those in less privileged positions, culminating in a patronizing kiss. His comments and belittling remarks reveal a disdain for intellectual merit, suggesting that success in education is more about social maneuvering than academic prowess. This aligns with findings in literary analysis, where characters' dismissals of intellectual merit often underscore societal critiques about the prioritizing of social standing over genuine knowledge or competence (Putri & Malini, 2024).

Miss Noel's dedication is tested when her aunt suggests that giving up teaching could lead to a promotion, implying that career advancement is influenced by aligning with others' agendas rather than merit. where external influences shape institutional roles, career advancement is shown to be more about political maneuvering than professional merit (Magadán-Díaz & Rivas-García, 2023). The focus on exporting students for labor raises concerns about the educational system prioritizing marketability over genuine learning, reflecting deeper issues of inequality and the societal pressures to prioritize economic benefits over comprehensive education (Irwin et al., 2024).

Miss Noel arrives late to join a group photo with the school's hierarchy, positioning herself with pride and humility on the lowest step. Much like other literary depictions of social hierarchies, this scene reveals how institutions use positioning to symbolize power dynamics and status, highlighting Miss

Noel's place in the hierarchical order (Magadán-Díaz & Rivas-García, 2023). Despite her position, her pride and humility reflect the complexity of her role within the institution, acknowledging her contributions and the limitations imposed by the hierarchical system. The hierarchical positioning of staff members significantly influences their roles and interactions within the institution (Čamber Tambolaš, Vujičić q, & Janček, 2023)

In the plot, the disparities presented within the educational system include administrative discrepancies, strife, financial sacrifices, uncertainty, farce, disillusionment, and hierarchy of positions.

4. Character Analysis

This phase of the study thoroughly explores the characters in the short story, meticulously analyzing their interactions, motivations, and societal roles through the perspective of Karl Marx's Class Struggle Theory to uncover the economic and social tensions that drive the narrative.

The Visitation of the Gods by Gilda Cordero-Fernando, portrays the dynamics within the Philippine education system through its characters. A principled English teacher, Miss Noel prioritizes her students' education over impressing her superiors. The principal, Mr. Olbes, and his wife are not on good terms with Miss Noel. Mr. Sawit, the new English supervisor, abuses his power for personal gain. Together, these characters highlight the challenges and complexities within the educational system.

Despite facing skepticism from her superiors, Miss Noel's dedication to her professional development underscores her commitment to education. By attending summer courses, she exemplifies a desire to improve her teaching skills for the benefit of her students. Her actions challenge the notion that quality education is a privilege reserved for the elite, highlighting her resistance to the systemic inequalities in the education system. Systemic inequalities in education reflect broader societal conflicts, where the ruling class maintains control over resources and opportunities (Piva & Santella, 2024). This commitment emphasizes the value of teacher development in attaining educational equity, which aligns with initiatives to alleviate educational inequities. This is relevant to character analysis as it offers more profound insights into the story by comprehending a character's motivations and behaviors (Jason, 2020.)

Throughout the story, Miss Noel remains unwavering in her commitment to educational excellence despite the flaws in the system. Her dedication reflects a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of education, a passion likely rooted in

Table 2
Character analysis

Characters	Characterization	Textual Evidence	Marx's Class Struggle Theory	Disparity within the Educational System
Miss Noel	Righteous Passionate	66 - 68 257	Struggle for Equality and Fairness	Neglect
Mr. Obles	Deceitful Authoritative	206 - 208 211	Power Dynamics and Social Hierarchy	Privilege
Mr. Sawit	Manipulative Opportunistic	170-171 262 - 263	Social Mobility and Individual Interests	Cynical

personal experiences of educational inequality. This passion is echoed in contemporary studies advocating for improved education infrastructure and equity (Fink, 2024). This is similar to character analysis, where delving into a character's motivations and actions offers an understanding of the story. (Jason, 2020). Miss Noel's struggle against a system focused on appearances resonates with modern challenges faced by educators, emphasizing the need for collaboration and systemic change to support passionate and dedicated teachers.

Mr. Olbes, the principal of Pugad Lawin High School, is depicted as an authoritative figure who manipulates situations for personal gain. His actions, showcasing the local cottage industry while restricting product access, reveal a deceptive nature that prioritizes personal benefit over the collective good. This behavior exemplifies the broader issue of dishonesty in educational leadership, where transparency and ethical decision-making are compromised. Such character traits often emerge central to narratives because they highlight the conflict between personal ambition and moral responsibility. Character analysis helps dissect the motivations behind a figure's behavior, allowing readers to explore the deeper social and psychological factors driving their actions (Team, 2022). Manipulative behaviors by those in power perpetuate social inequalities and hinder collective progress (Piva & Santella, 2024). This manipulation by Mr. Olbes can be understood as an abuse of authority, where leaders, instead of advocating for ethical practices, prioritize their self-interests, ultimately undermining the educational institution's core values.

Mr. Olbes' authoritative command to his teachers, coupled with his casual indulgence in privileges like ice cream, underscores his bourgeois status within the educational hierarchy. His behavior highlights the unequal distribution of power and resources in the school, where those in positions of authority exert control over subordinates. This dynamic perpetuates a culture of compliance and reinforces existing hierarchies, reflecting broader systemic inequities. Recent studies emphasize the importance of ethical leadership and transparency in educational settings to foster equity and collaboration (Villaver, 2024). The new forms of social struggle and political domination call for an update as to how to tackle this issue. This task becomes more complex due to insufficient development of these categories in Marxism. This aligns with the observed power dynamics in educational settings, where hierarchical structures often mirror broader societal inequities (Piva & Santella, 2024). The narrative also contrasts Mr. Olbes' outdated leadership style with modern educational practices emphasizing transparency, collaboration, and equity, underscoring the ongoing challenges in achieving effective and fair educational leadership.

On the other hand, Mr. Sawit, the new English supervisor, contrasts sharply with Miss Noel, embodying opportunism and cynicism in his interactions with colleagues. His behavior reflects a broader issue of educational inequality, where those in power exploit their positions at the expense of others. Studies on education inequality emphasize the role of systemic disparities in perpetuating these issues, with figures like Mr. Sawit representing the challenges of achieving true educational reform. As noted in an analysis essay guide, 'analyzing characters involves understanding their motivations and the broader social context in which they operate' (Liden, 2024.) and characters like Mr. Sawit often serve as a critique of systemic flaws, highlighting the need for ethical leadership (Team, 2023). This underscores how Mr. Sawit's actions are not just individual failings but part of a more significant systemic problem. His opportunistic actions highlight the need for accountability and ethical behavior in educational leadership to ensure that the system serves the interests of all stakeholders, not just those in positions of power. D. W. Livingstone emphasizes the importance of empirical Marxist studies of class structure and class consciousness, arguing that 'without solid data, discussions about class and class consciousness are often just guesswork' (Livingstone, 2024). This aligns with the observed power dynamics in educational settings, where hierarchical structures often mirror broader societal inequities.

Neglect, privilege, and cynical are the Disparities within the Educational System portrayed by the characters.

5. Theme Analysis

This phase of the study analyzes the themes using Karl Marx's Class Struggle Theory. The themes focus on the disparities within the educational system.

The theme of power dynamics in the Philippine education system is highlighted by how authority figures, like superintendents, wield significant influence over principals, who, in turn, exert control over teachers. This is illustrated when the superintendent arrives, and the principal reacts with awe, symbolizing the hierarchy in educational institutions (Gumarang, 2021). As thematic analysis suggests, "themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs which investigators identify before, during, and after data collection" (Sovacool & Hall, 2023). This notion aligns with how power is a recurrent theme in educational hierarchies, shaping interactions within the system. The struggle between the principal and teachers is further emphasized through the principal's orders to gather fifty hats, prioritizing his desire to impress the superintendent rather than addressing actual school needs (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019). This reflects the broader societal issue where the positional gap between administrators and teachers leads to inequality and

Table 3
Theme analysis

Theme	Textual Evidence	Marx's Class Struggle Theory	Disparity within the Educational System
Power Dynamic	101-102 213-215	Struggle Between the Principal and Teachers	Positional Gap
Rising Corruption	210-211	Exploitation of the Teachers	Inadequate Support
Erosion of Value Principled Stance	292-293 257-259	Alienation of the Teachers Resistance of the Teacher	Moral Decay Educational Struggle

power imbalances.

The exchanges between the principal and the superintendent, where favors like buntal hats are swapped for presents, demonstrate corruption in the narrative by showing the abuse of power for one's own benefit. (PIDS, 2022). The transactional nature of these gifts can be seen as a form of thematic corruption, where "a theme can be defined as the thread of an idea or argument that pervades a work" (Callaghan, 2023). Authority inequalities within the educational system can enable unethical conduct and normalize corruption, as seen by this systemic issue where favors are paid to preserve relationships with people in authority (Philippine Orphanage Foundation, 2022).

In this regard, the erosion of values in the educational system becomes well exposed through the story as the superintendent of schools is unconcerned with genuine issues and concerns relating to Education but instead shows interest in superficial transactions alone (Gumarang, 2021). The thematic analysis supports the idea that "the identification of themes is what gives qualitative research its explanatory power" (Sovacool & Hall, 2023), evident in how corrupt practices such as gifts and bribes are used to uphold appearances over addressing real educational needs. Teachers like Miss Noel lament the lessened emphasis on teaching merit and highlight how teachers are rewarded for favoritism and blind conformity to power (Epistemic et al. Education, 2022). This focus on power-pleasing over educational integrity weakens the overall effectiveness of the education system.

Miss Noel's principled stance reflects her resistance to the corruption and conformity present in the education system. Despite the pressures, she chooses to speak out against the abusive practices, highlighting the significance of upholding educational values over appeasing authority (Freire, 2023). In the context of power struggles, the theme "represents the deeper meaning that unites the various elements of a story or argument" (LitCharts, 2024), which is exemplified by Miss Noel's conversation with Mr. Sawit, where she criticizes the "sweepstakes agent supervisor" for exploiting teachers. This dedication to fairness and integrity (Giroux, 2021) emphasizes the need for structural reforms to protect educators and promote a more just and equitable environment for all.

6. Creative Write-back

Below is an essay that is written as a creative write back in response to the short story that carries out the result of the investigation.

"Unmasking the Facade"

In "The Visitation of the Gods" by Gilda Cordero-Fernando, the superficiality and pretense of the school inspection process are laid bare. The story's protagonist, Miss Noel, grapples with the disillusionment of an educational system more concerned with appearances than genuine learning. This mirrors the current state of the Philippine educational system, where bureaucratic red tape and a focus on metrics often overshadow the true purpose of education. Teachers, much like Miss Noel,

find themselves caught in a cycle of preparing for inspections rather than fostering critical thinking and creativity in their students (Pereras, 2020). The story poignantly highlights the disconnect between the ideals of education and the reality faced by educators and students alike.

Relating this to the Philippine educational system, one can see the persistent challenges that hinder meaningful educational reform. The emphasis on standardized testing and compliance with administrative requirements often leaves little room for innovative teaching methods. Just as Miss Noel realizes the futility of the inspection charade, many Filipino educators struggle against a system that prioritizes form over substance (Perepas, 2020). The story serves as a powerful critique of an educational system that needs to shift its focus from mere compliance to nurturing the holistic development of students. By addressing these systemic issues, the Philippine educational system can move closer to realizing its true potential, much like Miss Noel's unwavering commitment to her students' genuine learning.

7. Conclusion

As revealed in the findings of this study, it is found that Gilda Cordero-Fernando's *The Visitation of the Gods* reveals disparities within the educational system.

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