

**THEMES ALONG MILLENNIAL POETRY**

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**Abstract**

Millennial expressions in poems can be attuned to their way of thinking and living. Consequently, this qualitative study utilized poems composed by millennial learners in a Philippine Literature course and explored the embedded themes. Theme, as a literary device, was focused in this investigation. Textual analysis was employed to analyse, interpret, and describe the central ideas of the poems, explaining millennial voices in a literature classroom. Six themes emerged and centered on love, family, dream self, life sacrifices, friendship, and gratefulness to God. Moreover, seven subthemes were identified under the theme of love, which were forsaken love, unrequited love, confused love, physical admiration, familial love, companionate love, and self-love. The themes were deemed replications of the millennial experiences in the generation. Poetry hence offers a gauging strategy of eliciting immediate, meaningful life experiences of millennial in particular. Literature teachers are then tapped to hear the millennial learners and use their voices as springboard in engaging productive, sympathetic literature classrooms.

**Keywords:** Millennial, Philippine Literature, poems, themes, textual analysis

**1. Introduction**

Being a literature teacher, requiring students compose their own poems is one of the million authentic strategies that could exhaust meaningful life experiences. This pedagogical practice mirrors the belief that literature can be an ideal instructive resource for developing learners' communicative competence, language skills proficiency, and multicultural awareness (Celce-Murcia, 2006), establishing connection between the learners and the literary texts (Senatin&Centera, 2009), and shaping learners' personal growth (Carter &Long, 1991).

In my two Philippine Literature classes that I recently handled, I required my literature students, as part of their terminal outputs, to compose original poetry pieces that follow the structure, sense, and sound elements discussed in class. Hence, I instructed them to write in traditional, blank verse, or free verse, apply handful of words with denotation and connotation, imagery, and tropes, and use figurative sound devices such as rhythmical

patterns, assonance, consonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, among others. I also allowed them to pen their poems on a theme, one element emphasized in the class, of their choice so they could freely express their thoughts out of the experience in hand. And since the course followed a regionalized approach to literature teaching, I did not then restrict them the use of any language. Consequently, my students penned their poems in any language used and understood in the classroom context.

While I was closely reading their individual poems, recurring ideas were emerging and centering to common themes. Noticeably, these themes seemed unifying partly because of my students' millennial literary attributes. On this note, Sellers (2016) correlated the millennial generation and their ways of writing. Millennial then were born in the 1980's and onwards (Sellers, 2016), in the years 1982 to 2003 (Wilson & Gerber, 2008), or from 1980 to 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Sutherland & Thompson, 2001). Considine, Horton, & Moorman (2009), Kumar (2014), and Sellers (2016) further described this generation to be internet power possessing and postmodernism cognizant, as they are now more engrossed with technology in this digital era. As Sellers (2016) hinted, the role of technology, which is reflected in the ways millennial live, hugely affected the voice of the literary community today. Furthermore, she claimed millennial generation to be fearless and liberating attuning their attitude to poetry. This openness, in fact, prompted people, millennial in particular, define more political, exciting, and innovative poetic expressions of social issues, love, and independence. Today's generation thus write poetry far different from previous decades, as the former experienced a more diverse age (Pew Research, 2014).

As a common agendum to generational works of research, quite a few studies on millennial's ways of expression have been subjected to exploration. Some studied how they behave and learn (Kumar, 2014; Wilson & Gerber, 2008) and how their characters affect their voice in the literary community (Sellers, 2016; Sutherland & Thompson, 2001; Twenge, 2006; McGlynn, 2005; Eubanks, 2006). Howe & Strauss (2003) pointed specialness the reason why millennial behave in an apparent different way. This distinction thus led to being privileged and protected by the society, which then made them confident in achieving life success, hence full of optimism. Contrastingly, Sutherland & Thompson (2001) described in their observations the changing cycle of the age before and today. Specifically, millennial tend to be provocative, as they believe that their views are equal with the previous generation, and that they would always be right. They also posited family relationships, technological advancement, and learning input and experiences to have affected their manner of thinking

and living. Twenge's (2006) study moreover further revealed millennial's self-centeredness. This meant that they are more expressive on societal issues. As such, they conform to social trends. This may be qualified to how millennial learn; it is when their real-life situations are valued in class (McGlynn, 2005). In a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2012) research review, millennial, being in the most diverse generation, are confident to define brand of experiences, such as forms of relationships, gender roles, obstacles, education, and family, among others. Conclusively, as believed by Eubanks (2006), these themes may seem differing but are complementary, and they suggest common ground of experiences.

Poetry writing, as one rich channel of expressing what millennial feel, pressed me, as a literature teacher to account what they have been further experiencing in the present generation. Interestingly, my students, being deemed in this study as part of the millennial circle, penned poems which themes are noteworthy to previous studies and, upon subjecting to analysis, may be a valuable input to 21<sup>st</sup> century literature teaching and learning. It is thus in the course of this study to explore the themes emerging in their poems. Doing such explains millennial thinking, hearing their voices in the literary community, and ascertains pedagogical choices in literature classes.

## **2. Theoretical Underpinnings**

### *2.1 Literary Constructivism*

Aiming to cast the themes depicted in the millennial poems, literary constructivism sheds light in this investigation. As a theoretical support, literary constructivism believes that a poem is a "construction" itself created by the interrelation of "images, devices, language, and theme" (Cuddon, 2013). Constructivist writers further claims that a poem must contain dominance of meaning, encapsulated in a theme (Makaryk, 1993).

Moreover, sense, in a form of a theme, makes poetry. Constructivists argue that if a poet hardly expresses himself orally, he uses pen to word his feelings. Thus one of poetry's function is to bear the sense through words, which are expressions of what humans intend to convey (Makaryk, 1993).

### *2.2 Expressivism*

Expressivism, one major critical theory, defines poetry as an "expression, or overflow, or utterance of feeling, or as the products of poet's feelings, vision, and/or state of mind" (Abrams, 1953). Therefore, authorial experience is conveyed in a literary work. This study then sees poetry as a mirror of the poet's life experiences or, in case of an indirect experience, the persona's character's life and times in the work.

Together, literary constructivism and expressivism strengthen the contention that millennial poems exemplify themes significant of the generation.

### **3. Theme as a Literary Device**

This exploration bounds on theme, which is a literary device in literature, in poetry specifically. Broadly, a theme is an “abstract concept” (Hamilton, 2007) or “general idea” (The Writers Academy, 2018) that recurs in most penned literary works. More so, Hamilton (2007) defines the theme of a literary work as the intended “central idea” that can be extracted in a direct or implicit reading, and that is fundamental to any human experiences (Curry & Samara, n.d.).

In another view, a theme bridges the message of a text to its readers. It is hence a generalization of points it communicates to the readers. Curry and Samara (n.d.) pointed that a theme in a piece of work links across human aspects. It then implies significant human experiences, in forms of human relationships to himself, to others, and the universe. Makaryk (1993) added that a theme is a manifestation of the relationship between the author and the world. Consequently, what humans feel emerges through a theme in literature, art, or films.

Theme tells the underlying meaning of a work of literature, such as short story or poetry. According to constructivists, a theme is hinted in the linguistic choices of the author, in the words that he uses in writing (Makaryk, 1993). Hence, what the writer feels, thinks, or experiences is exemplified in the words of the literary work he pens.

Literary works may contain multiple themes. Commonly authored pieces are themed with “courtship, the horror of war, or conflict between parents and children” (Hamilton, 2007), “love, fate, and family” (The Writers Academy, 2018), and “beauty, courage, friendship, love, nature, parent-child relationships, quest for knowledge, religion, revenge” and among many others (Curry & Samara, n.d.). With this, it is then easy for a reader to detect the themes because they reappear in number of literary pieces constantly (The Writers Academy, 2018).

In sum, a theme is a big idea in literature, art, or films that may aid the readers in fully understanding the entire literary work.

### **4. Methodology**

Drawn on verbal data, this qualitative study accounts the themes recurring in the 60 sampled millennial poems. Data analysis adopted a textual analysis or interpretive study which follows a systematic procedure of “describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating

the persuasive force of messages embedded within texts” (Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G., 1999). Through textual analysis then, this study describes the themes found in the poems, explaining millennial voices in a literature classroom. Informal interview of the student-writers, who were grouped according to theme, increased the robustness of the study. Ethical measures were also considered during the conduct of the study, such as participants being informed and oriented of the data gathering process and identity of poems remained anonymous.

With the students’ poems in hand, I first read each piece a number of times, highlighting the words, phrases, or sentences, from the title to the end of the poem, that would exemplify a unit of idea, abstract concept, or theme. Then, I classified them specifically into group of themes, which were named respectively. The extraction limits to one to two themes per poem only. Lines that depict each theme were cited accordingly. The descriptive discussion finally followed that emphasized the varied themes possessed in the poems, gauging implications to literature teaching and learning.

The study further discloses that the student-writers were enrolled in a Philippine Literature class and were generally untrained in creative writing, poetry in particular. This means that the students wrote accorded by the instructions in class, hence an interesting note of study for the authenticity of the materials. Lastly, the researcher is the instructor himself of the course in Leyte Normal University, a Philippine public tertiary teacher-education institution.

## **5. Themes in Millennial Poems**

Textual analysis revealed six varied themes that emerged in the millennial poems under study. Major and subsequent themes were identified then. For each theme, lines or stanzas were cited from the poems, corresponded with discussion.

### *5.1 Theme 1: Love*

Love reappeared a number of times in most of the poems, of which seven subthemes were identified and grouped.

#### **5.1.1 Subtheme 1: Forsaken Love**

Forsaken love, as deemed by the millennial, is abandonment. The feeling of abandonment stems to millennial experiences of breaking someone’s heart, of being left by someone, and of bidding farewell to each other.

Following are lines that exemplify how millennial renounce their special feeling, of any reason, for someone. Represented by the first-person subjective pronoun I, the persona

explicitly tell his/her departure from someone. The expression *I let go* found in the first line of the poem asserted how the persona abandoned the rose, a symbolism for a special person or a lover perhaps, and so does in the proceeding poem which uses the line *I left you*.

*“In the middle of the night,  
I let go of the rose I adored...”*

*“The real one is left behind in the past  
Because I left you there.”*

The feeling of being left by someone is expressed in the subsequent poems. Generally, the poems made use of the line *You left me* which directly means how, by any reason, the persona is left. Moreover, the *You* implies the special someone, lover who left the persona.

*“Kinitilmoangbuhayngmundoko...  
Isa kangulapnabumaba at di nabumalik  
Na hindimanlangnang-iwannghalik...”*  
(*“You ended my world.  
Like the sky that descended and never returned,  
And never left a kiss...”*)

*“A man with a shank  
In the corner of her eye  
Flipping the pages of her book  
A girl emplaces his eyeglasses.”*

*“You left this world  
Leaving my broken heart...”*

*“Yesterday, my heart was full of joy  
But now I'm in pain because of you left me, my boy.”*

*“...Aanhonkopag-atubanghininkinabuhinga mag-usa  
Konwarayanamanhaakonmagpakita?  
Bagabagaka la hinbulannganagpakitangantigda la nawara...”*  
(*“How will I face this life alone  
when you left me then?  
Like a moon that suddenly disappeared...”*)

In the poems below, both lovers expressed their vow of leaving from each other, of which reasons are implied. It is evident in the expressions *Our I Miss You*, *You get tired, I get tired*, *We are no meant for each other*, *Our promises seemed unfulfilled*, claiming both parties' departure.

*“But as the time passes by  
The I Love You’s became dry  
Our I Miss You made us cry  
And the feelings are about to die...  
So now let this be a farewell...”*

*“One day, everything goes wrong  
You get tired, I get tired.  
Everything so complex and hard.  
And that ends everything about me and you.”*

*“Dirikita para ha kadatagsaitonantinuod...  
Pagturohanluhadikonapupudngan  
Dara hankabug-at ngainabathiningaakondughan...”  
(“We are not meant for one another.  
Tears unbearably fall  
Brought by this heavy feeling...”)*

*“...Mgapangako’ytilanagbago  
Mundonati’ygumuho  
Luhaangsalahatang tanging sumalo.”  
(“Our promises seemed unfulfilled,  
Our world shattered,  
Embraced by tears.”)*

#### 5.1.2 Subtheme 2: Unrequited Love

Unrequited love, sometimes called as one-sided love, is an unreciprocated love. The poems below describe how the persona felt love unrewarded by his/her beloved. The beloved then may be unaware, but reasons root to being engrossed with many things and offering a love defined only within the bound of friendship.

*“Ngunitika’y nag-iba  
Ayawmonaakongmakasama  
Dahilmaramikangginagawa.”  
(“But you change  
You do not want me to stay  
Because you are preoccupied with work.”)*

*“Kaya’tpusoko ay nagingluhaan  
Dulotngngpagmamahalnapangkaibiganlamang.”  
(“My heart is but pained,  
Brought by this kind of friendly love.”)*

### 5.1.3 Subtheme 3: Confused Love

Although believed to be rendered with reciprocity of feeling, love can sometimes be confusing. The persona in the poem below expresses his/her feeling of bewilderment between two forces, love or friendship.

*“Love or friendship?  
I’m torn between the two...”*

### 5.1.4 Subtheme 4: Physical Admiration

Physical admiration is a form of love admiration that emphasizes an appeal to physical and personal qualities of someone. It is vivid on the descriptions below how the personas express their physical adoration to someone. They further use similes and symbols to complement their beloved.

*“Your lips is like a shining rugby,  
You had a pair of fair eyes like a star in the deep night sky  
Your smile is like a sun that always bright my day...  
I smile and giggle whenever you are around...  
I am thinking about you continuously.  
I am daydreaming about you so intensely.”*

*“Mgapalihimkongpagsulyap,  
Gamitangmgamatangayawnangkumurap...”  
(“These secret glances  
With my eyes that never want to blink...”)*

*“Pagnakitahaim  
Dughannagbubuto-buto  
Nalilisang! Dire maaramkonanu it bubuhaton.  
Pagnatawaka, bagaak hit linga.  
Diri gusto mawarahaimpangitaan.  
Bagabagaka hit bulan, maupaypagkinitaon...”  
(“Whenever I see you,  
My heart feels uneasy.  
Confused! Troubled of what to do.  
When you smile, I’m like a fool  
I don’t want to be lost in your eyes.  
You are like the moon, attractive to look at...”)*

### 5.1.5 Subtheme 5: Familial Love

Familial love is a natural affection of parents to their children vis-à-vis. The following poems depict a love expressed by a mother to her daughter, of a child to his/her parents, and of a daughter to her mother.

*“If I could wish a thing,  
It could be the confidence.  
And struggle to chase your dreams  
and a gift to know how deep  
my love for you, my daughter.”*

*“Thanks for all the sacrifices.  
All our needs suffices.  
I ask God that you’ll live longer.  
I’ll be thankful and love you forever.”*

*“Ma, I’m sorry if I can’t help myself not to cry.  
It’s because I miss you, and I love you.  
And it’s more painful to say these words,  
While I am thinking of you.”*

### 5.1.6 Subtheme 6: Companionate Love

This form of love reciprocates between two lovers and is lived by compassion and commitment to one another. Intimate lovecenters in this kind of bond. The lines below prove the promise of consummate and enduring love.

*“All this time, I was her, I am her.  
Got my best nights with you, Quim, my life-changer.  
It was us, when the night changes.”*

*“Ayokonangmawalaka, O akingmahal  
Kahitanongproblemaatingmalalampasan  
Dahilsatibayngatingpagmamahalan...”  
(“I don’t want to lose you again, O my love.  
We will surpass whatever circumstances  
Because of our love this strong.”)*

### 5.1.7 Subtheme 7: Self-love

Self-love or love for oneself is paying regard to oneself. That is, pointing one’s own happiness and contentment. The lines from one poem below exemplifies how the persona encourages himself/herself in spite of life deliverables.

*“You fall  
You break  
You think you’re small  
And feel so weak.  
Love yourself despite your flaws.  
Love yourself more than anyone else could.”*

### 5.2 Theme 2: Family

Vivid in the lines, this theme defines family as God-given care, comfort, and enlightenment.

*“The God’s greatest gift to me;  
They are my everything, my heart, and my soul;  
Family is the reason behind my smile and success...”*

*“Ika’ynagsilbingliwanag  
Kaya dapatnatularan  
 (“You serve as light  
That has to be followed.”)*

*“Pinakamagandangbigayngdiyos  
Sabawatisa.  
Pamilyangnagmulat, nagturong tama at mali.  
Pamilyangnagaruga at nagalaga...”  
 (“God’s greatest gift  
To everyone  
A family that enlightened, taught the right and wrong  
A family that nurtured and cared...”)*

*“Bayanina kung ituringsalipunan at tahanan  
angAmangtahanannahandakangalalayan.”  
 (Deemed as a hero by the community  
A father of the home who is ready to support you.”)*

### 5.3 Theme 3: Dream Self

The personas in the following lines tell their self-endeavor in education. Although it is not easy as described, they see themselves achieving in their respective fields.

*“A journey to this profession  
Is not an easy selection.”*

*“I may not be Ellen DeGeneres  
But, someday I can be a speech therapist.”*

*“A place of imagination  
I saw myself that I’m a teacher already...”*

*“When I see and hear children’s gentle voice,  
I can see my future – being a teacher.”*

#### *5.4 Theme 4: Life Sacrifices*

A concept of suffering also emerged the millennial poems. The lines hereunder show the unwanted struggles that the personas have been through. Crying has been the foremost resort then.

*“I closed my eyes.  
I saw myself suffering from all failures.  
And I end up crying every night asking myself, “What have I done?”*

*“After happiness, there are tears that fall.  
Even how hard I try, there is always a hole.”*

#### *5.5 Theme 5: Friendship*

Friendship is a kind of relationship between or among people or group of people who have high concern for each other. Further, it is a strong bond of interpersonal connection of common persons. Friendship in the lines below are described as blessing and priceless treasure. The personas then feel grateful because of their God-sent friends.

*“I have that one friend  
That sent me from above...  
She’s always there when I need her...  
A true friend indeed she is  
For me is a big blessing.”*

*“It’s hard to lose a friend  
A friend who is special,  
So take when you have a friend  
Because friendship is a priceless treasure.”*

#### *5.6 Theme 6: Gratefulness to God*

Gratefulness to God is also one noteworthy theme that surfaced in the millennial poems. It refers to being thankful for the many things God bestowed us. In the poems, the personas state their praise of gratitude to Jesus Christ, being their Lord, and to God in general, for the protection through the light from danger and provision of life.

*“Oh! HESU-CRISTO!  
Salamatsaliwanagmo  
Akongayo’ynakalayasadilimnaito.”*

*(“Oh! Jesus Christ!  
Thanks for your light.  
I am now freed from darkness.”)*

*“SalamatHesu-KristoakingPanginoon.  
Ika’ymananatilisapusokahitsaan man pumaroon.  
 (“Thank you Jesus Christ my Lord.  
You will forever stay in my heart wherever I go.”)*

*“Sa Diyoslagingmagpasalamat  
Sa buhaynaatingnatatanggap...”  
 (“To God always be grateful  
For the life that we continuously receive...”)*

## **6. Discussion, Implication, and Recommendation**

As aimed in this inquiry, the millennial poems have been found to possess varied themes that may manifest their way of thinking and living. Themes of love, family, dream self, life sacrifices, friendship, and gratefulness to God come form part of their lives. Apparently, the central ideas in the poems may be sources of their direct or vicarious experiences. With the claim of Sellers (2016) and other authors of generational studies on millennial being fearless and liberating, the emerging themes suggest that what they have been writing are accordingly replications of their age. Hence, their poetic expressions revolve on social issues, love, and independence.

Consequently, this study caused a realization that poetry offers a gauging strategy of eliciting immediate, meaningful life experiences of millennial in particular. With this, literature teachers are tapped to hear the millennial learners and use their voices as springboard in engaging productive, sympathetic literature classrooms.

Further exploration to capture the depths of the experiences of the millennial behind their poems is then recommended.

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