

Living Through Poverty: Unearthing Social Setting in *One October Ends* (2025) by Emeniano Acain Somoza, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the physical and social settings in the fictional short story *One October Ends* (2025) by Emeniano Acain Somoza, Jr. This study examines the physical and social settings in the short story *One October Ends* (2025) by Emeniano Acain Somoza, Jr., and how they influence the characters' roles, family dynamics, and experiences of poverty. The method of this research is a qualitative descriptive approach through a literary analysis. The discussion is divided into three main parts: first, the physical and socio-economic environment influences the roles and responsibilities of characters, particularly children. Second, the family home is a site of emotional safety and cultural values shaped by the setting. Lastly, the setting functions as a critique of broader social injustice and structural limitations. Each section highlights how place and poverty shape the characters' lives, underscoring that the story's setting is inseparable from the human experience it portrays. The analysis results show that most of the story is set in a poor village in the Philippines, with locations such as swamps, river mouths, and small bamboo houses—not just ordinary settings but symbols of a harsh, limited life. The environment in this story serves as an ambivalent symbol: on the one hand, the world outside the house is dangerous and frightening; on the other hand, the home becomes a safe space where the characters take care of one another and feel protected. In this context, the house symbolizes not only safety but also solidarity, protection, and survival amid social injustice.

Keywords: One October Ends, Philippines, poverty, family relations, symbol

ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti latar fisik dan sosial dalam cerita pendek fiksi *One October Ends* (2025) karya Emeniano Acain Somoza, Jr. Latar dalam cerita pendek fiksi menggambarkan waktu, tempat, atmosfer, konflik, dan karakter yang terlibat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi masalah latar belakang fisik dan sosial. Metode penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis sastra. Pembahasan dibagi menjadi tiga bagian utama: pertama, lingkungan fisik dan sosial ekonomi memengaruhi peran dan tanggung jawab karakter, khususnya pada anak-anak. Kedua, rumah keluarga adalah tempat keamanan emosional dan tempat pembentukan nilai-nilai budaya yang dipengaruhi oleh latar belakang. Terakhir, latar berfungsi sebagai kritik terhadap ketidakadilan sosial yang lebih luas serta keterbatasan struktural. Setiap bagian menyoroti bagaimana tempat dan kemiskinan memengaruhi kehidupan karakter, menekankan bahwa latar dalam cerita ini tidak dapat dipisahkan dari pengalaman manusia yang digambarkannya. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar cerita berlatar di sebuah desa miskin di Filipina,

dengan lokasi-lokasi seperti rawa, muara sungai, dan rumah-rumah bambu kecil— bukan sekadar latar biasa, melainkan simbol kehidupan yang keras dan terbatas. Lingkungan dalam cerita ini berfungsi sebagai simbol ambivalen: di satu sisi, dunia di luar rumah mencerminkan bahaya dan ketakutan; di sisi lain, rumah menjadi ruang aman tempat para tokoh merasa diperhatikan dan terlindungi. Dalam konteks ini, rumah tidak hanya melambangkan kemakmuran, tetapi juga simbol solidaritas, perlindungan, dan keberlangsungan hidup di tengah ketidakadilan sosial.

Kata kunci: One October Ends, Filipina, kemiskinan, kekeluargaan, simbol

INTRODUCTION

In fictional stories, the setting does not merely function as a background of time and place; rather, it actively shapes how poverty is experienced, understood, and reproduced in characters' lives. When a story depicts poor or lower-class places, poverty is structurally embedded in everyday life rather than visible only in physical objects. Family environments have a significant impact on how children perceive safety and stability, as Cummings and Davies (1996) clarify through their Emotional Security Theory, demonstrating that the setting is inextricably linked to emotional life. This indicates that the setting is closely tied to individuals' emotional and psychological experiences, particularly within the family. Subsequent research supports this link: Davies et al. (2002) discovered that how family environments handle conflict and adversity has a significant impact on children's sense of security. This suggests that children's emotional stability is shaped by the conditions within the home, which are often influenced by broader socioeconomic pressures. Inequality manifests itself not only at the community level but also within the home. According to Bixby (2024), overlapping structures of age, gender, class, and geography shape socioeconomic well-being by limiting opportunities long before people make their own decisions. When these perspectives are combined, they show that poverty is not a neutral backdrop but an active, structuring force that shapes how people live, struggle, and persevere.

In the story *One October Ends* (2025) by Emeniano Acain Somoza, Jr., the main setting is a poor village in the Philippines.

Places such as swamps, river mouths,, and simple bamboo houses are not just ordinary locations; they represent complex social conditions and are full of the limitations the characters experience. The daily life of the family in this story, such as looking for red crabs or dividing household tasks, at first glance seems ordinary, but actually reflects economic uncertainty, the distribution of shared responsibilities, and emotional ties within the family. Economic difficulties force all family members, including children, to join in the struggle to survive. This condition shows that their bond is dual: on the one hand, it is fragile because it is constantly threatened by economic pressures, but on the other hand, it is strong because they depend on each other for emotional support and survival.

The urgency of this research lies in understanding how contemporary Southeast Asian literature, especially Filipino short stories, represents poverty through setting. For instance, *Sexuality, Class and Family in Children's Short Stories after EDSA II* (Majul, 2017) shows how children in short fiction negotiate class roles and family responsibilities under conditions of poverty, with home and school settings serving as spaces of social conflict. This suggests that setting already shapes social expectations, particularly for children. Similarly, *Perspectives of Filipino Youth on Poverty* (Bernarte, 2015) explores how young Filipinos perceive poverty, emphasizing that although they are aware of structural conditions, concrete everyday settings, such as the home, are rarely explored in narrative texts. This indicates that there is still limited attention to how setting is represented in everyday lived experiences. More recently, *Caught in the Middle*:

Narratives of Family and Class in Philippine Short Fiction (Suarez, 2022–2023) underscores how domestic settings in lower- and middle-class contexts contain tensions between ideal identities and economic realities. This highlights how setting reflects social tension, but does not fully examine its role as an active force. Taken together, these studies show that although poverty and class have been widely discussed, the role of setting, especially as part of everyday life, in shaping both social roles and emotional experiences has not been fully explored. This is particularly evident in studies that still treat setting mainly as a background, rather than as something that actively shapes economic conditions and family relationships. In response to this gap, this study addresses this gap by focusing on how setting functions as an active force in shaping both the economic realities and family dynamics in the short story *One October Ends* (2025).

As a result, this thesis influences how the setting affects the characters' economic and social issues in *One October Ends* (2025). It focuses on how the story's characters' roles, responsibilities, and experiences are shaped by their socioeconomic surroundings. It explores how the socioeconomic environment shapes the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of the story's characters. It also considers how setting functions as a means of critiquing broader social inequality by shaping both. By focusing on these features, this study seeks to show that setting is more than just a backdrop; it is a crucial factor that shapes both the characters' material and emotional lives.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative literary analysis because literary texts require interpretive approaches to uncover implicit meanings and symbolic representations. This approach emphasizes depth of interpretation, making it well-suited to exploring how the setting reflects socioeconomic inequality. Rather than testing theories or statistically measuring variables, the analysis centers on examining the socioeconomic realities and symbolic

elements embedded in the text itself. Through this qualitative literary approach, a deeper understanding of the ideas, values, and societal criticisms conveyed by the setting emerges, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of how the story constructs physical, social, and symbolic spaces to portray socioeconomic conditions.

The following are the steps in the analysis. To identify key elements of poverty, societal conditions, and family dynamics, the text was read several times to gain initial familiarity, identify key elements, and develop thematic interpretations. The information was then divided into three categories: (1) physical setting, referring to the time and place of the story; (2) social setting, referring to the social conditions and relationships among characters; and (3) setting symbolism, referring to the symbolic meanings attached to the setting. The data consisted of story excerpts, place descriptions, and dialogues that illustrated the socio-economic setting, selected based on their relevance to the themes identified in the analysis. The theoretical frameworks of Vescovi (2017) and Vijayalakshmi et al. (2024), which highlight the setting as a mirror of social inequity and a means to critique socioeconomic conditions, are also incorporated into the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To explore the role of setting in representing socioeconomic inequality, this discussion is divided into three main parts. First, it examines how the physical and socio-economic environment influences the roles and responsibilities of characters, particularly children. Second, it examines the family home as a site of emotional safety and cultural values shaped by the setting. Lastly, it analyses how the setting functions as a critique of broader social injustice and structural limitations. Each section highlights how place and poverty influence the characters' behavior, emotions, and relationships with one another—ultimately emphasizing that the setting in this story is inseparable from the human experience it portrays.

1. Burden and Roles: Children in the Shadows of Poverty

In the story *One October Ends* (2025), the setting is a poor fishing village on the coast of the Philippines. Here, the setting not only portrays geographical locations such as swamps, rivers, and seas but also reflects the harsh, unstable socio-economic conditions. People's lives entirely depend on the natural seasons, especially the red crab harvest. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), around 25% of rural families in coastal communities live below the poverty line, making their dependence on seasonal resources highly precarious. This can be seen in the father's statement, "...what does it mean to have missed the red crab season, right?" (Somoza, 2025). This statement transcends a mere concern for harvest; it reflects the structural precarity and temporal dependence embedded in the setting, where a family's survival is dictated by the unforgiving rhythm of nature. In such challenging conditions, every small opportunity becomes a vital anchor for survival, underscoring how the physical environment directly shapes the family's well-being amid life's uncertainties.

Furthermore, the economic instability of this coastal environment necessitates a shift in domestic labor, where children are expected to participate in daily work under constant financial pressure. The narrator tells that the main character is used to washing dishes and taking care of his younger siblings: "I was busy washing dishes when I heard them fussing..." (Somoza, 2025). This picture is clear and broader, as it often occurs in low-income households, where children's contributions are essential to family survival. For instance, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) reports that over 152 million children worldwide engage in child labor, often involving unpaid household services that restrict their development. Similarly, Save the Children (2020) emphasizes that in Southeast Asia, children in poverty frequently assume caregiving roles. In the context of *One October Ends* (2025), these statistics validate the story's realism, showing how the specific economic constraints of the setting transform child labor from a social phenomenon into a direct consequence of the characters' struggle

for existence within their environment. Especially when parents are absent due to work or economic pressure, children are pushed prematurely into adult-like roles. Ultimately, the story depicts how the socioeconomic pressures of the setting prematurely thrust children into adult-like roles, fundamentally altering their childhood experience.

2. Home and Faith: Warmth in the Cold of Hardship

The story of *One October Ends* (2025) portrays the house as a shelter and a source of meaning, especially when the outside world is so dangerous and threatening. Even though they live in a bamboo house with a bare-bones life, this family's strength is reflected in their shared routines, cultural practices, and everyday expressions of care within the household. Such representations align with the study of low-income households in the Philippines, which emphasizes that despite a lack of material resources, the house remains a central space where cultural values and emotional stability are fostered (Tatel-Sentengco & Florida, 2018).

In particular, the role of the mother is crucial in this story. She is not merely an ordinary housewife but a protector and guardian of family peace. When the father had to go to the swamp in the morning to put a crab trap, the mother immediately went to the altar and prayed "She headed towards the altar... mornings always felt blissfully worlds apart from the worries." (Somoza, 2025) This sentence shows that security and peace do not come from material things, but from the presence of parents and the spiritual power they carry. Winter, Davies, and Cummings (2010) argue in the theory of emotional security that children feel safer when parents respond to stress and sensitive anxiety. This concept is reflected in "One October Ends" when the danger comes, and the mother gathers her children: "Mother huddled us together, then ordered us to pray with her." (Somoza, 2025). Instead of panic or physical defense, the mother offers comfort through prayer and hugs, demonstrating how

emotional support stabilizes the family amid external chaos. Children commonly rely on parental figures as primary sources of emotional security, particularly when facing uncertainty or perceived danger (Silalahi et al., 2025). This shows how the theory manifests in the story: the house becomes safe not because of its physical strength, but because of the mother's emotional and spiritual presence. When danger comes—when a foreign creature breaks into their house—the mother's reaction is to immediately hug the children and invite them to.

Not only does it present tension, but this story also does not forget to show small, warm, and funny moments in the family. For example, when one of the twins gets stuck in a clay pot, they end up laughing together, described as laughing intensely (Somoza, 2025). This moment of shared laughter not only provides emotional release but also reflects the family's resilience as they navigate their constrained living conditions. Similarly, Bohanek et al. (2006) suggest that sharing family narratives and everyday experiences like this helps children develop a sense of identity and increases emotional cohesion. Household narratives build a strong “intergenerational self”—a sense of who they are within the family network. As Vijaylakshmi et al. (2024) explain, even in times of economic hardship or life stress, the family can still be a strong space of resilience, a place where we can feel safe, accepted, and loved. That's the point this story is trying to make: home is not about the building, but about the people who live in it.

In the end, the home in *One October Ends* (2025) is shown as a fragile space that turns strong because of the people inside it. The mother's prayers, the children's laughter, and the family's closeness make the house more than just bamboo and leaves—it becomes a shield against fear. Yet this safety is not the whole picture. Outside their door, poverty and rigid social boundaries are already waiting, shaping what the family can and cannot become. This contrast between warmth

inside and inequality outside leads us to the next issue: how poverty in the story is framed not as a simple choice, but as a fate written by the structures surrounding them.

3. Inequality and Voices: Poverty Framed as a Choice or Fate

The short story *One October Ends* (2025) illustrates that poverty is significantly shaped by the social structures surrounding individuals rather than by personal effort alone. The phrase “framed as choice or destiny” highlights the tension between the common societal belief that poverty results from poor decisions or laziness and the reality that it is often produced by inherited conditions within family and community environments. The notion of “voice” represents the family's continuous expression of love, unity, and everyday survival, suggesting that they remain expressive even in hardship. Drawing on a Marxist perspective, the story critiques how unequal social systems confine individuals to predetermined roles, while also revealing small but persistent forms of resistance that convey hope and resilience.

The short story conveys social criticism through its portrayal of the setting and its characters' everyday experiences. By illustrating an environment filled with limitations, the narrative shows how individuals are forced to live in vulnerable conditions shaped by broader social structures. This implies that injustice is not solely rooted in economic issues but also in social systems that limit people's opportunities to grow and improve their lives. As highlighted by Mustafayevna Begmatova et al. (2022), social stratification in literary works often mirrors real societal structures that restrict social mobility. Therefore, the story suggests that poverty is not simply the result of personal choices but is largely shaped by societal conditions.

One prominent example is when the narrator notes that the area where the characters live is divided by occupation. “Funny... how our place was partitioned according to vocations...” (Somoza, 2025)

Here, the word funny is not humorous but ironic, reflecting a bitter recognition of how absurd and unjust social organization can be. The narrator points out that the type of work people do is already divided by where they live and who their parents are, so children's futures are set even before they grow up. This sentence implies that since childhood, children in the village have been directed towards an inevitable future, depending on where they live and their parents' jobs. Indirectly, this illustrates how social structures can shape a person's life trajectory, even before they have a choice.

Although the conditions described are complex, this story does not stop at the impression of suffering. Complexity here refers to the interweaving of economic hardship, social stratification, emotional struggle, and moral responsibility. Economically, the family is completely dependent on the unpredictable rhythms of nature, where missing the red crab season means losing their primary source of livelihood. Socially, the village is divided by occupation, limiting children's futures based on their parents' occupations, reflecting structural inequality. Psychologically, the children are deprived of a carefree childhood, having to assume adult responsibilities too early, while their parents live in constant anxiety. In such a limited situation, we can see the spirit to survive. Even in a threatening situation, the father figure still shows great responsibility and affection. "Papa was too damn swell to ever give up on any one of us" (Somoza, 2025). This aligns with the findings of Bawati et al. (2025), who show that family resilience often emerges from strong social relationships and emotional support among family members, especially in the face of social and economic uncertainty. This shows that, even though their world is harsh and unfair, they still have the strength to care for one another and survive together.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that the setting in *One October Ends* (2025) is not simply a background but an important element that shapes the characters' economic realities, social roles, and emotional lives. Through a

qualitative literary analysis, this study explores the setting in its physical, social, and symbolic forms and demonstrates how these aspects work together to represent poverty and family dynamics in the story.

The analysis reveals that the physical environment reflects material hardship and influences how responsibilities are shared within the family, especially among children. At the same time, the home becomes a space of emotional security, where relationships, cultural values, and spiritual practices help the family remain resilient. In addition, the setting also functions as a form of social critique, showing how structural inequalities and social systems limit individual opportunities and shape life paths.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how setting works as an active force in literature, especially in representing everyday experiences of poverty. It also highlights the importance of looking at ordinary spaces, such as the home, as places where larger social issues are lived and experienced.

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