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### **Formalist Critique**

Paz Latorena's short story "The Small Key" tackles issues of gender dynamics, power, and control. This critique examines the literary components of the story, such as plot, characters, setting, and symbolism, to assess how well the narrative conveys its concepts. It does so through an analysis from a formalist perspective.

"The Small Key" shows a straightforward plot with a pretty linear progression of events without significant deviations. The story centers around a married pair Soledad and Pedro, who reside on a lonely island, and their interaction with a locked cabinet containing the belongings of Pedro's former lover. The action is thoughtfully designed to draw strong emotions from the reader combined with its simplicity allows for a focused exploration of the characters and holds their attention.

The characters of "The Small Key" though presented with minimal depth, primarily serving as archetypes within the narrative, significantly influence the plot's overall impact. Soledad, the submissive and obedient wife embodies both strength and weakness, and Pedro the dominant husband, embodies traditional gender roles, while this may enhance the story's exploration of gender dynamics, it heavily restricts the characters' leaving them feeling one dimensional.

The lonely island setting offers a backdrop that highlights the story's themes of seclusion and secrecy. The setting intensifies the sensation of imprisonment or being in an enclosed space far from everyone else mirroring the feeling of loneliness.

Symbolism is a significant part of "The Small Key," with it "the small key" being a symbolism as well. The locked cabinet represents Pedro's secrets and his past, while the key symbolizes control and power, though the symbolisms are straightforward and lack depth.

Strong imagery and vocabulary are used throughout the story, which were concise and straightforward. However, the narrative's concision hinders the subjects' elaboration and the opportunity for vivid description. The speech is unnatural and falls short of accurately capturing the subtleties of human connection, making it difficult for the reader to empathize with the characters and feel their feelings.

The way the tale is organized also affects how important it is. It is divided into two parts, each of which focuses on a different facet of the protagonist's emotional growth. The first section shows how the pair appears to have a great marriage, with Soledad, the wife, being portrayed as submissive and devoted.

By exploring the more sinister facets of their marriage, the second portion disturbs this tranquility. Curiosity leads Soledad to find her husband's secret box, which is secured with a little key. Her view of their relationship is upended when she learns of her husband's infidelity, and she faces many emotional challenges. To convey Soledad's mental haziness, the tone changes to one of grief and ignorance.

The narrative's message, which emphasizes on the detrimental effects of mistrust and how secrets may harm a relationship, can be understood by examining Soledad's emotional journey. Soledad's struggle with her identity is mostly caused by the conflict between her wifely obligations and her own goals and aspirations.

The narrative also offers a more thorough analysis of gender roles and cultural norms. At first glance, Soledad's submissive demeanor seems to conform to female stereotypes of the era, but after finding out about her husband's adultery, she starts to question these conventional beliefs. The book subtly challenges the idea that a woman's value is primarily decided by her role as a wife and challenges readers to think beyond cultural standards to the nuances of human interactions.

In conclusion, "The Small Key" provides a linear plot form for an examination of power relationships and gender roles. Although the story is straightforward, allowing for a focused exploration of its topics, its efficacy is hindered by its limited characterisation, underdeveloped setting, overt symbolism, and constricted language. From a formalist standpoint, the story falls short in its capacity to hold the reader's attention and convey a deep grasp of the issues it wants to tackle.