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The Fiction of Rosario de Guzman Lingat: A Preliminary Study

Soledad S. Reyes



Rosario de Guzman Lingat was one of the most popular writers of *Liwayway* in the late 1960s and 1970s. Hardly a week passed without *Liwayway's* countless readers seeing Lingat's texts—short stories and serialized novels. This was sufficient proof that Lingat's works were favorably received by thousands of people. Then in 1980, after writing a large number of short stories and a few novels (she even tried her hand at writing for the popular *komiks* magazines), she stopped publishing her works. Since then she has maintained silence.

A few of her short stories are included in some anthologies. Her prize-winning "Estero" is a favorite piece. Recently, *Ang Silid na Mahiwaga* (1994), an anthology of poems and short stories in Filipino, featured three of Lingat's short stories. But the majority of her works have remained largely inaccessible because not a single anthology devoted exclusively to her fiction has come out. Moreover, unlike some of her contemporaries writing in the postwar decades, she has not been viewed as an object of critical analysis.

This preliminary study seeks to situate Rosario de Guzman Lingat in the history of writing done by women in Filipino, and by discussing illustrative short stories and novels. It hopes to establish Lingat's significance as a major postwar writer.

A Sociocultural Context

When Lingat started to write in the 1960s for *Liwayway*, the way had been paved for her by female writers whose popularity rivaled that of male authors. As early as the second decade, novels had already been written by female authors without the need to use pseudonyms which was the case in other countries such as England and the United States.¹ In the ensuing decades, especially with the instant

popularity of the short story, more female writers became familiar names to the readers of *Liwayway*, *Sampagita*, and *Hiwaga*. Among these fictionists were Rosalia Aguinaldo, Hilaria Labog, Susana de Guzman, Belen Santiago, and Carmen Batacan, Carmen Herrera, who would dominate the scene as late as the postwar years.

Publishing side by side with male writers, the female authors appeared to have been accepted by the reading public. The problem confronted by the likes of the Bronte sisters in England, Mary Ann Evans in England, and George Sand in France who found it difficult to be published unless they used male pseudonyms, seemed not to have posed any difficulty to the Filipino female writers.²

Male authors as superior writers manifested itself, in the prewar and postwar years, in the inclusion of predominantly male names in the rosters of the period's most significant stories.³ The anthologies or honor rolls were prepared by male editors among whom were Clodualdo del Mundo, Alejandro G. Abadilla, and Teodoro A. Agoncillo whose criteria may be loosely termed formalist.

The anthology, *Ang 25 Pinakamabubuting Kathang Pilipino*, which came out in 1944, is significant for its inclusion of five female fictionists, all of whom were neophytes when compared to such stalwarts as Aguinaldo and Labog. Liwayway Arceo, Gloria Villaraza and Lucila Castro, three of the female writers in the anthology, would eventually have more of their works published in weekly magazines. The emergence of this generation of writers should, in retrospect, be considered as a break in the hegemony constituted in the writings of the older writers.

By the 1940s female subjectivity had been firmly constructed according to conservative values. The woman in the works of de Guzman, Labog, Aguinaldo, Jovita Martinez, appeared as the quintessential martyr/saint in the guise of a mother and/or a suffering wife. A foil to her was the woman as a temptress/fallen angel (the Americanized, citified Filipina or the proverbial prostitute/mistress with a golden heart) (read Reyes [1982, 1-22]). Rosalia Aguinaldo's award-winning "Ay! Ay!" and Jovita Martinez's "Ang Silid na Mahiwaga" highlighted the image of the woman as a victim, while Filomena Alcanar's "Ang Huling Tagumpay" and Rosalia Aguinaldo's "Nang Siya'y Umibig" depicted the woman as less than a perfect model of proper behavior.

Thus, in numerous short stories and novels the omniscient point of view frequently pointed out the need to preserve traditional values of obedience, fidelity, patience for these were the desired traits

in a daughter, a sweetheart, and a wife. Opposed to these values were traits—rebelliousness, a questioning mind, individualism—that threatened the very foundation of a stable family life. In general, there was no blurring between the polarities of what was desirable and undesirable (socially and morally). Either the woman was an “angel in the house” (to use Coventry Patmore’s phrase), a despicable home-wrecker or an ungrateful daughter.

The Postwar Generation of Female Fictionists

A number of female writers who became household names after the Pacific War actually started to be published during the war years. Among them were Liwayway Arceo, Genoveva Edroza, Gloria Villaraza, Lucila Castro, Anacleto Agoncillo, Pilar Pablo, Aurora Cruz, Corazon Arceo, Lina Flor, Aurea Santiago, Leonila Gatmaitan Jose, Rosenda Mojica, Beatriz Geronimo, and others. In addition to *Liwayway*, the following magazines served as outlets of their fiction: *Malaya*, *Daigdig* (both short-lived), *Tagumpay*, *Aliwan*, and *Bulaklak* which would be steady sources of women’s works until the 1970s.

With the entry of some of the younger female writers in the production of popular fiction, the history of the short story (and by implication, the novel) appeared to have undergone some changes. Firstly, the young writers appeared to have been more adventurous when it came to form and style. The tendency to cram numerous episodes in one narrative which made for an exceedingly complicated plot structure was tempered. Instead of emphasizing external events, the new writers strove to delineate the processes in the heart and mind of the characters. As Teodoro Agoncillo has perceptively pointed out, the short stories published during and right after the war exhibited characteristics that were different from those that shaped the fiction of the prewar generation of writers (see Agoncillo 1949).

More importantly, the likes of Arceo, Agoncillo, Villaraza and Matute, utilized a perspective that was almost always, and self-consciously, from a woman’s point of view. Arceo’s classic “Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa” is a masterful depiction of the interwoven narratives focused simultaneously on the persona’s journey and eventual insights into the nature of love, and the harrowing experiences undergone by her mother (the betrayed wife) and her dying father who until his death professed his love for the mistress. Edroza’s “Mga Sugat: Maging Matagal at Malalim” is a poignant depiction of the effects of

war and inevitable dislocation on a mother and her children. Lina Flor's "Nagbago si Isa" details the typical experiences of a pregnant woman, her self-loathing at the imagined loss of physical attractiveness.

This is not to say, however, that with these women writers only distinctly female experiences were brought to the fore. The demands of the magazines' readers, conventionalized and codified through the decades, could not be satisfied by texts that were somewhat different from what the public had been accustomed to. But innovations were incorporated into the short stories and novels of some of the female writers through a more careful examination of fictional materials and a more self-conscious execution of formal devices to constitute a fictional world.

Another factor, which is beyond the purely literary, should be cited to explain the creation of a wider space in the depiction of the female in some stories. Many of the young writers and their postwar readers were products of the system of education instituted by the American colonial regime. Having studied mostly in public schools (elementary and high school), and in some cases, in possession of advanced college degrees, the writers were exposed to writing other than vernacular works. Liwayway Arceo, Lucila Castro, Rosario Lingat, all studied in Torres High School and first contributed their works to the school's *The Torch*. Pilar Pablo and Genoveva Edroza had degrees in education, while Anacleto Agoncillo was a doctor of medicine and a graduate of the University of the Philippines. Consolacion Mantaring, on the other hand, was a graduate of law. Some of them such as Gloria Villaraza and Anacleto Agoncillo started out as writers in English.

It is fair to assume that whatever training these writers initially possessed was honed in their curriculum and complemented by their own readings in western literature. Indubitably, these influences culled from their education should be perceived as having shaped their views of the world, mediated as it were, by their own experiences of the same world. Their own readers probably knew and liked Susana de Guzman and Hilaria Labog, but were themselves open to less conventional ways of constituting diverse realities. The works of Liwayway Arceo were an eloquent proof of this bonding between author and readers.

Rosario de Guzman was born on 28 February 1924 in Ricafort, Tondo. Her father, Vicente de Guzman, was a well-known zarzuela director and actor whom the author has acknowledged as the most important single influence in her life and career. She studied in Torres

High School, noted for a large number of graduates who have enriched Philippine Literature, in English and in Filipino.

At the age of fifteen, de Guzman wrote her first work, "Ako si Florita," a radio play which was eventually performed two years later in the program which starred Dely Atay-atayan and Andoy Balumbalunan. Her first short story, "Sulu" came out in *Taliba* when she was sixteen years old. Three years later, *Liwayway* published her short story "Nagugunita Mo Ba, Ding?" These early works, she claims she wrote in response to an irresistible urge which was also pleasurable at the same time.

Ang mga ito'y isinulat o bilang pagbibigay sa isang anyayang hindi matanggihan at nagbibigay-kasayahan.⁴

(I wrote these in response to an invitation I could not decline and which gave me much pleasure.)

She further claims that games and outings held no attraction for her in her youth, and that she was much happier reading or watching films. She would never outgrow these habits in later years.

Except for a couple of works she wrote in English, Lingat devoted her time being a wife and a mother for almost two decades. She was married to Sabino Lingat by whom she has six children: Emmanuel, Stuart, Medardo, Jennifer, Lorraine and Noemi.

In the 1960s, after the children had grown up, she decided to resume her writing career as she started to write for *Liwayway* and *Filipino Free Press*. In 1967, her short story, "Estero" was the short story of the year in *Filipino Free Press*. In 1971, her novel *Ano Ngayon, Ricky?* won first prize in the annual literary contest sponsored by *Liwayway*. In the same year her short story "Kahit Manika Lamang" was also given a prize for excellence.

A prolific writer, she had written by 1976 a total of 192 short stories, several novels, poems and essays. Another field that she explored was the *komiks* where she wrote for the top *komiks* magazines in the 1970s. She also published her works in English in such magazines as *Weekly Graphic* and *Sunday Times Magazine*. Her short story "Growing Pains" was published by the prestigious *Asia Magazine*.

A Reading of Rosario Lingat's Fiction

Literature's specificity and strangeness preclude the certainty that its variousness can be explored in a definitive interpretation. Indeed,

literature continues to exceed "any formulas or any theory with which the critic is prepared to encompass it" (Miller 1982, 5). Various schools of reception theory have argued, quite strongly, that texts are not bounded and that meanings are indeterminate.⁵ Moreover, factors other than the formal should be considered in any attempt to comprehend the process of producing meanings.

Thus, the reading of Lingat's illustrative short stories and novels should be perceived as a tentative, albeit exploratory, attempt to make sense of a vast network of images and experiences that Lingat has collectively constructed in her fiction. A kind of simplification takes place as the tapestry of woven experiences appears less complicated, once some order is imposed by analysis.

The Past in Present Memory

What is striking in Lingat's fiction, a quality, that shapes not only her short stories but even her novels, is her incessant and painstaking attempt to locate a past, reconstruct it, and make it an integral force in the present. This is not to say, however, that what the fictionist does is merely transplant actual historical experiences from the past to the present, and eventually present it to the readers with the injunction that lessons derived from this past must be made to bear fruit in the present. This is a naive reading of Lingat's achievements, for the self is not the source of meaning. On the contrary, it is the work that constructs the self in manifold ways.

Lingat's narratives are woven of images that suggest discontinuities, discord and mayhem that are usually associated with war. In the act of remembrance, the confusion is intensified even as the narratives appear to careen madly between what was and what could have been, between the sordid truth and the unachievable ideal. The sadness that permeates the texts then becomes almost unbearable.

In a number of stories set against the background of the Second World War, the persona frames the narratives against the the act of wounding both the individual and collective psyche.

The number of wounded characters in Lingat's fiction is staggering. The pain is not only physical—crippled, maimed, blinded—but moral and emotional, for such is the horrendous impact of war on its individual victims.

War does not remain an abstraction that strategists discuss and politicians declare. It is a monster that claims its victims at will, almost whimsically. The stories probe not the end-product of such violence but

the complicated process which leads to such a state of disequilibrium and disquiet. A net is thrown from which nobody can escape, not even the text's reader who, through a process of complicity with the narrative, finds it difficult to break loose from that which has ensnared him/her.

"Sa Bukangliwayway ng Isang Kalayaan" illustrates the series of complexities from which nobody can run away (Reyes 1992, 248-55). Set against the period of Liberation, the story revolves around a band of guerillas headed by Fermin, tired and hungry and angry at this point when the Americans had finally arrived but with the Japanese still very much around the beleaguered city. In Pritil, a district in Tondo, where the guerillas have set up temporary headquarters, gunshots can still be heard. The war is not over. The battleground has widened to include the hearts and minds of characters whose love for their country has been sorely tested and who have, with much difficulty, survived.

The surrealistic setting as the story begins is intensified in the Aeneas-like figure of Fermin holding his aged mother's hand and dragging a sister as they flee the burning city. The mayhem and confusion in the physical world is replicated in the web of relationships that the story eventually unfolds. Fermin finds out that Alcaraz, the guard on night duty, has left because his nephew was shot while stealing goods from the depot. Lope and Kardo, assigned to the check point in Herbosa, decide to confiscate the eggs and vegetables an old couple had planned to sell. The same Lope then accuses a girl, Nieves, of having been a spy because she had the courage to tell Lope that the latter, who wants to confiscate their sack of rice, is worse than the Japanese.

Fermin himself does not escape unscathed from the conspiracy of greed, deceit and treachery. He frees Morelos who has been accused of spying for the Japanese and who has been responsible for the deaths of their own comrades because Fermin took pity on the spy. Thus he violates the operative and only permissible code: the right of the state to discipline and punish its own erring subject.

As the story ends, the narrative's tense is changed—from the past to the future—even as the last scene conflates two sets of memorable images:

Bago matapos ang limang buwan, ikakasal sila sa munting kapilya sa Dagupan. At dalawampu't limang taon pagkaraan, magiging suliranin nila ang kawalang kasiyahan ng isang kabataang kabilang sa mga lider-

estudyanteng humihyaw ng pagbabago. Babalikan nila ang panahong ito sa buwang-liwayway ng kalayaan upang hanapin ang dahilan. At sasaliin nila ang naging kamalian.

(Before five months are over, they will get married in the small chapel in Dagupan. And twenty-five years later, a dissatisfied young man joining the student-leaders' cries for reform will become their problem. They will recall this dawn of freedom to look for the cause. And they will try to dissect what went wrong.)

The reasoning is causal: the faults and defects of the present which demand radical changes must be perceived as rooted in the actions of the older generation who wasted the opportunity to right a fundamental wrong by allowing themselves to succumb to the same mistakes they targeted in their enemies.

The story ends on an elegiac tone as it mourns what could have been but did not come to fruition because those who were responsible for putting the country on the path to liberation were trapped into becoming active agents of further destruction and death. The irony lies in the realization that the enemy is really within the human heart.

In "Higit sa Pag-ibig, At Lahat" (Reyes 1994, 248-56) which is set during the Japanese occupation, Lingat further delves into the reasons that have led Dando, to betray Al, a guerilla fighter. Pacing, Al's wife, dies in childbirth even as she carries into her grave the memory of her husband's bloodied shirt. Matilda, Pacing's friend who dared to rebel against her mother and society's conventions by having an affair with Dando, does not allow her passion for her lover to stop her from informing the next victim, Andring, of Dando's plan to betray him in exchange for the life of Dando's father who is languishing in prison. Andring eventually shoots Dando as Matilda cries out in pain.

Matilda, tasked with trying to save lives as a doctor's aide in a maternity clinic, and who is herself heavy with Dando's child, does not hesitate to inform on her lover once she is certain that Dando has been guilty of treachery. Between love for a person and love for the country, there is absolutely no room for doubt as to which love should be privileged. As she runs to warn Andring, she remembers what the latter told her earlier while talking about the uncertainties of life in this war-torn country: "Sa kasalukuyang panahon, higit ang humihingi sa ating sarili." (In these days, more is demanded of ourselves.)

It is Matilda, the female character, and not Fermin, the fearless guerilla who succumbs to pressure, who appears to have been made of sterner stuff. It is Matilda who learns the need to make the supreme sacrifice rather than have another guerilla murdered. Before her dead lover she can do nothing but profess her love for him which, although deeply felt, becomes secondary to a greater commitment to country. It is with her that, through a series of narrative moves which position the reader to see things from the point of view of the female character, the reader eventually identifies unequivocally. Like Matilda, the reader mourns the death of love to bring about a greater good.

If war has its charlatans and vipers, it also breeds heroes and heroines as Matilda herself graphically embodies. Unlike national heroes who are held in awe, idealized and immortalized through statues and monuments, the heroic characters in a number of stories by Lingat are rendered almost invisible, their deeds largely ignored if not totally forgotten by an ungrateful nation.

One of these tales that deconstruct and decenter the notion of hero is "Si Juan: Beterano" (*Liwayway*, 24 January 1972) which is set in the tumultuous years immediately after the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. The story revolves around one afternoon in the life of Juan, a peanut vendor who, like a monument, has become a permanent fixture along Avenida. The story dazzles because of its bold interweaving of past and present—between the Second World War and the 1970s. Amidst the uproar and din created by the demonstrators chanting, mantra-like, the evils of the Marcos regime, Juan watches impassively, the only movement being the process of remembering what it was and how it was to live and survive against tremendous odds during the Japanese period.

Juxtaposed against the words repeated over and over by an increasingly agitated crowd of youthful demonstrators are tales of valor and sacrifice surrounding the person of Juan, the courageous guerilla leader who lost his sweetheart, his friends, and who was in danger of losing even his life as he struggled against the enemies. The wizened face of a fifty-year-old former guerilla, who has known what it meant to suffer, serves as a compelling contrast to the demonstrator's faces unlined by pain and suffering. Juan can only feel intense loneliness at the sight of such unmarked faces.

The marchers leave and Juan's eyes are arrested by a sign in Japanese—the second invasion has come about. This sight occasions the flow of memorable images from a haunted past:

Muling nabuhay sa kanyang isip ang mga kulay ng dugo, ang mga wasak na katawan, ang usok na nagluluwal ng mga naghihinalong daing [hindi ba kay Fredo ang isa?], ng iyak ng mga tili ng sindak. Sa pagkapawi ng usok, gumala ang mga babaeng nakasabit sa mga bisig ng mga itim at puting kawal . . . ang mga daing ay pinalitan ng nagkakatuwaang halakhak na gumugulong sa ibabaw ng mga naiwang abo at sunog, maiitim na labi. Kung sino ang nawalan, kung sino ang naulila, ay parang hindi na napakahalaga. Ganap ang tagumpay at malaya na ang bayan.

Malaya?

Ilang ulit ipinakipaglaban ang kalayaan ng bayang ito?

Kinapa niya ang malaking pilat sa kanyang hita. . . .

(The color of blood, the mutilated body, the smoke through which muted laments of the dying could be heard [wasn't Fredo's one of them?], and cries of horror and fear returned to him. When the smoke lifted, women in the arms of black and white soldiers appeared . . . and the cries gave way to laughter rolling on the ashes and dying embers, black remains. It was no longer important who lost, and who were orphaned. Victory was complete and the country was free.

Was it really free?

How many times have freedom been fought for?

He touched the large scar on his thigh. . . .)

The story ends as Juan becomes aware of the anger in his heart, for what he fought for still remains to be realized. A sense of profound loss finally overwhelms him as he listens to the feet marching to the tune of an unknown drummer.

"Ang Espiya" is a further variation on the themes explored in "Si Juan: Beterano" where memory plays a vital role in constructing and reconstructing the past repeatedly for a man who looks at himself as a writer who finds it difficult to create anything.⁶

The sight of a distant belfry triggers in the unnamed narrator a wave of memories that brings him back to 1943, more than two decades before the nightmare that was the Vietnam War takes place. He hears the strident calls for change among the youth, the desire to remake the country in their own image, which preoccupation Lingat's other narratives have deftly depicted. The trail leads the narrator to remember Dorina, a woman who loses her husband when Japanese soldiers murdered a large number of barrio folk. The narrator and Dorina discover many similarities between themselves—both left behind by a loved one and both suffering from intense loneliness. Both are victims of a war not of their own making.

In Pinagbilaran which is their destination, the narrator and Dorina lead separate lives. Another fateful encounter takes place, though, when the narrator hears Dorina admit being the spy whose information has led to the hijacking of two trucks of weapons and ammunitions. The Japanese retaliate by threatening to shoot five people for each day that the spy is not caught. But Dorina eludes the Japanese and puts an end to her life by jumping from the church belfry.

As the story ends, the narrator reveals himself as the real spy. Dorina's martyrdom has allowed the narrator to continue his mission for his country. The narrator realizes that he will treasure this memory until the day he dies.

Unlike Juan in the previous story whose heroism fits the stereotype of the fearless guerilla, Dorina has defined her worth to her country by keeping silent and not divulging the identity of the real spy. She could have saved her own neck, for there is no reason to own up to a deed she has not done. She chooses to give up her life, quite dramatically at that, so that others may live. She is the narrative's central character as she is the person who shapes her own destiny and in the process, actively wills to destroy herself for the greater good. In life and even in art, the woman is the silenced one. In this story, she is the sacrificial victim of a distinctly male ethos: the cruel war fought with guns and breeding violence and death.

The life and death of Dorina and the life of the narrator, or what is left of it, are an effective foil to the sound and the fury emanating from the young. He muses:

Dumaraan sa isip ko na may kabataan na naman na walang takot na haharap sa kamatayan kung sakali, sasagasa sa walang pangalang mga panganib at magiting na mag-aalay ng buhay sa tawag ng kabayanihan. At naitatanong ko sa aking sarili: hindi na ba magwawakas ang ganito? Hindi na ba mawawala ang paghahangad ng tao sa sariling pagkadakila at ang pag-alis ng hadlang sa hangaring ito?

(I see the image of youth who will fearlessly face death, if the need for it arises, confront countless dangers and bravely offer their lives in response to calls for patriotism. And I ask myself: will this never end? Will the desire for self-aggrandizement and the wish for all obstacles to it to fade away never disappear?)

In the series of reminiscences, the narrator returns to the past, filters the events covered with blood and gore, goes to his desk and his typewriter and imposes a sense of ending to this complicated network

of experiences. The figure of the woman remains permanently lodged in this act of remembering. She dominates memory's fiction. She is the absence that shapes the narrator's agitated presence.

In the above-mentioned stories, the characters inexorably turn their back on the present which is difficult to comprehend, and look backward to the past, perhaps as confusing and as ugly as the present. The difference lies in the ability of these characters, scarred and wounded, to understand the reasons which were worth dying for. The reasons for the convulsions wracking the present are a little harder to figure out and must remain a problematic that will render each return to the past a mandatory act if only to make sense of the world in all its complexities. The war thus serves as a central image derived from the past which the present must acknowledge to determine its future. This appears to be the main theme of some of Lingat's stories which are suffused with a deep historical sense.

Youth and the Follies of the Young

This elegiac tone that has shaped a number of Lingat's stories which liberally use the war as a controlling symbol also determines some texts that are focused on the specificities of present-day events. In a number of short stories, the narrator takes on the difficult role of a chronicler, a witness to and oftentimes participant in the events contextualized against the late 1960s and early seventies. In each construction, the writer weaves various strands which eventually constitute a discourse centered on the young and their painful introduction to life's bitter realities.

With consummate artistry, the author has oscillated between a person's consciousness and the realities that ultimately prove to be recalcitrant and resistant to any form of control. In utter confusion the youth find themselves faced with several choices, and choose what they must in order to survive an increasingly hostile and fractious world.

When the country can be likened to a volcano about to erupt, with its almost insurmountable socioeconomic and political problems, what kind of commitment should the young make? A number of stories and one novel of Lingat attempt to organize the fictional world by revolving around young protagonists, suffering from an excess of idealism and eventually undergoing some kind of disillusionment and betrayal.

In "Krus, Isa sa Marami" (*Liwayway*, 15 November 1971, 6-7), Lingat creates Marte who finds himself forced to grow up in a situation of

profound despair. Set against the late 1960s, the story details the growing disillusionment of the protagonist as he sees the shrinking *pan de sal* on the table, the long lines of people fighting to buy rice contextualized against the prevailing politics of corruption and ostentatious display of wealth. Basketball gives way to rallies and demonstrations. His father remonstrates and warns Marte against allowing himself to be used by powerful people. Marte shrugs off the advice by asserting that he is no longer the naive person that he was.

The death of Larry Mabulos, an activist, inspires Marte to commit himself more deeply to the cause being waged by the Ang Malayang Bagong Kabataan whose chairman is the charismatic Rolly Banez. He graduates from merely hurling pillboxes to something more dangerous: the assassination of traditional politicians. He discovers, to his great grief, that the mastermind, Rolly Banez, is himself a politician out to eliminate his political rivals. Instead of planting the bomb at the convention center, Marte throws it into the river. He leads the life of a fugitive which ends, one evening after trying in vain to talk to his father, when Rolly Banez shoots him. The fate that has befallen his model, Larry Mabulos who died under mysterious circumstances, finally overtakes him.

Marte is reduced to, as the story ends, one of the many crosses that stand for the numberless who thought they were fighting for a noble cause but who never realized, as they met their violent deaths, that what has been passed off as a demonstration of patriotism is really plain and simple opportunism practised by characters like Rolly Banez. In his death is found the cessation of everything, as the story points out unambiguously:

Ngayon, hindi na niya naririnig ang patuloy na pagkutya, ng pambubuska, ng pagtutol. Hindi na niya maririnig ang sigaw ng pagkakaisa at pakikibaka. Ang mga sigaw at awit na nagpainit sa kanyang batang dugo, nagpatulin sa pintig ng kanyang puso, Hindi na niya nakikita ang mga bandila at sumisigaw, lumalait, sumusurot na paskil. . . . Hindi na niya nadarama ang mga pang-aapi, pagmamalabis, ang tagilid na katarungang nagpapaalab sa mga aba. . . .

Hindi na.

Sa isang malungkot na libis, na hangganan ng mga kahapon at simula ng mga paglimot, namamahinga siya sa katahimikan. Isang krus, isang pangalan.

Isa sa marami.

(Now, he will no longer hear those continuous insults, jibes, and refusals. He will no longer hear the shouts for unity and struggle. The cries and songs that warmed his youthful blood, and caused his heart to beat faster. He will no longer see those banners and slogans that rage, berate and attack. . . . He will no longer feel the exploitation, abuses, and injustice that anger the oppressed. . . .

Nevermore.

In a desolate spot, where yesterdays end and where forgetfulness begins, he rests in peace. One cross, a single name.

One of the many.)

In another story, "Ano'ng Ginagawa Mo?" (*Liwayway*, 29 May 1972), Digno escapes Marte's fate by treading a different path. Desperately in need of a job, he realizes that marriage cannot survive on love alone. Three options, each represented by a character, lie before him in this poverty-stricken community. Dando is the drug-addict who loses all respect and ends up a bloody mess after he is caught stealing. Dando, however, is only one of the numerous victims of Gomez, the drug-pusher, who offers Digno a job as a pusher. Gomez, for a time, is the only means to escape the deadening effect of poverty, but Digno decides against this action when, before his eyes, Gomez dies of a massive overdose of cocaine.

Ed is the student activist who spends all his time attending rallies, participating in teach-ins, and generally getting involved in highly political activities. A commerce student, he is a foil to Digno who is only a high school graduate and who remains unemployed because companies prefer to hire college graduates. Ed has the opportunity to finish his course and be gainfully employed, but education takes the background in the face of what is perceived as a nobler cause.

Mang Luis is a war veteran, the acknowledged wise man in the community, constantly dishing out his comments on life, politics, and society. In a key incident in the story, Digno confronts Mang Luis and asks him what he has done to change the world by joining other young men in waging war against the Japanese. Mang Luis says:

Sa isang paraan, maaaring nagkulang kami. Kami'y mga labi ng digma, laksang kamatayan, at gutom. Ilan ang nagkapalad makaahon ng may buhay sa digmaang yaon ang hindi binago ng tatlong taon? Ang lupit ng ayaw palupig at ang timpi ng sumawa sa karahasan ay krus na nagsalubong. Ngunit kung nagkaroon ng pagkukulang, nangyari na iyon. Ano naman ang ginagawa ninyo *ngayon*? Ano ang ginagawa *mo*?

(In a way, we were probably remiss. We are the remains of war, of unimaginable deaths, of hunger. Who were fortunate enough to survive the war and were not transformed by these three years? The ruthlessness of those who refused to give up and the restraint of those who were fed up with violence met at the crossroad. Even if errors had been committed, they belonged to the past. What are the youth doing now? What are *you* doing?)

The questions posed by the older man have a certain urgency, for they demand a concrete answer from Digno who tends to blame everything and initially refuses to act. Mang Luis further suggests that they should help each other or work with their parents in order to insure a better life for the oppressed majority. This, in the final analysis, is more productive and might really lead to justice and peace.

As the story ends, Digno is shown getting all the money he has saved—one hundred and thirty seven pesos—to buy himself a camera and be a photographer. The path pointed to by Mang Luis' words is the only right path for Digno.

The story's thesis is clear: the youth must rely not on anybody or any promise of instant success or happiness dangled by people or institutions (Dando and Ed have been lured by the siren song). On the contrary, characters such as Digno must depend on their own initiative and must be willing to work hard to achieve some success. Only the present and the future matter and characters like Mang Luis who belong to the past should act as the young generation's conscience. Their duty to society had been fulfilled when they willingly gave their all in the service of country. Change can be effected, the narrative avers, not through violence nor through promise of instant gratification (leading to forgetfulness) but only through the concerted effort participated in by the young. In this scheme the past is represented by a voice which, it is devoutly hoped, the young generations will continue to listen to.

The Rage for Violence

The most comprehensive study of contemporary Philippine society is to be found in Lingat's *Ano Ngayon, Ricky?* (*Liwayway*, 29 May 1972) published at the height of student activism in the country. The novel gathers together, in a mosaic-like pattern, the various themes that have shaped the writer's previous imagings of the present and its indissoluble links with the past. Like her short stories revolving

around young people, this novel is centered, with sleuth-like fidelity to details of lived life, on Ricky Mendoza, a college student who finds himself in a sociopolitical maelstrom from which he cannot escape unscathed.

The tumult and confusion of society at large is reflected in the kind of life Ricky encounters as he is growing up in Tondo as the only son of Mang Mente, a political leader eventually killed by a neighborhood thug, and Aling Minang, who has a stall in the market and who later marries Elmo, a much-hated symbol of police brutality. Throughout this neighborhood, Ricky sees the vise-like grip of poverty and hopelessness on the inhabitants. He not only observes but, more importantly, becomes privy to and actually participates in the varied experiences of his friends and neighbors.

Ricky sees how extreme poverty has bred such character types as Mando and Boy Igme, who easily graduated from petty hooliganism to murder, and who are eventually killed by the policemen in a rub-out. He commiserates with Mercy, raped by unknown men, abandoned by her sweetheart, and perpetually brutalized by a drunkard father and a mother whose life is spent gambling. He sympathizes with Danny, a poor student and fellow activist who is spurned by his beloved's rich and arrogant father. He is overwhelmed with the tantalizing promises of pleasure offered by Paulinang Biyuda whose philosophy in life is *carpe diem*. He stands witness to groups of men talking endlessly about the country, its weaknesses and flaws, and realizes as he grows older that everything he has seen and heard are mere posturings borne out of personal despair and disillusionment, of their realization of their own puniness and helplessness.

Seeing how pervasive injustice and poverty have been, Ricky looks for a way out and this he finds in activism. Asked by Paulina what principles the students are fighting for, Ricky retorts:

Social justice, land reform. Ibig din namin na maibigay ang katarungan sa mga Pilipinong napatay sa loob ng mga base Amerikano. Alam ba ninyong mahigit nang tatumpo ang napapatay sa mga baseng ito at isa man sa mga nakapatay ay walang nilitis sa Hukumang Pilipino? Karamihan sa mga Amerikanong nakapatay ay pinawalang-sala at ang iba ay pinarusahan ng magaan lamang. Masakit isiping magaganap ang abusong ito sa sarili mong bayan.

(*Social justice, land reform.* We would also like to give justice to Filipinos killed inside the American bases. Are you aware that over thirty people have been murdered and not one of the accused has been

brought to trial in our courts? Most of the accused were eventually declared innocent, and a few were given light sentences. It is terrible to think that these abuses can take place in our country.)

Immersing himself in the activist movement, Ricky further realizes the irrelevance of formal education which, for most people, is the only effective means toward change. In rally after rally he distinguishes himself as a fiery orator, a responsible leader, a deeply committed nationalist.

The novel's final section then takes the reader by the hand and juxtaposes Ricky's actions against the tumultuous events of the 1970s—the numerous rallies and demonstrations staged by various sectors, the series of moves resorted to by the beleaguered President, the orchestrated attacks launched against the evils of feudalism, imperialism and fascism. Then Ricky meets Professor Alba, a former senator of the Republic, who claims he has quit politics because he cannot stand corruption, greed and opportunism. As a charismatic leader, Professor Alba becomes the idol of idealistic students even as he strikes his worshippers as a most upright and patriotic leader.

The novel then focuses on Ricky's descent from the heights of idealism and deep faith in student movements to effect changes. He sees Leong Bulldog, his father's murderer, at a rally and gets the killer's confession that he has been paid by Professor Alba to penetrate the student ranks and initiate moves that would lead to mass killings among both the activists and the military. Furious at this betrayal, Ricky confronts the professor and demands to know the motives for this dastardly attempt at manipulating people and history. Leong Bulldog was used to bring about the professor's greater glory revealed as his desire for power which he had tasted before as a senator.

In the end, he sees all of society's victims being dealt blow after blow, unable to rise because people like Professor Alba and his ilk continue to dominate Philippine society. In his moments of intense despair, he conjures up various searing images of people he has known:

Naalala si Vilma. Ang ama nitong hindi mapigil sa walang katapusang paghahangad ng salapi. Si Mang Teong na laging inilulugmok ng alak sa plasa, si Aling Goring na hindi makaahon sa sugalan. Ang mga lalaking nagpaparaan ng oras sa walang katuturanang satsatan sa gloryeta. At oo, si Paulina. Si Paulina at ang kanyang walang kasiyahan pag-ibig. Sila, at ang marami pa. Saan sa impiyernong nililikha ng mga ito matatagpuan ang katugunang makasasagip sa naghihingalong Katarungan at Kalayaan?

(Remembers Vilma. Her father and his obsessive greed for money. Mang Teong, in alcoholic stupor in the plaza; Aling Goring addicted to gambling. The men whiling away their time in mindless chatter in the *gloryeta*. And yes, Paulina. Paulina and her numerous unhappy loves. They and many more. Where in hell created by these people can answers be found to save Justice and Freedom now in the throes of death?)

Thoroughly disillusioned at a young age after putting his heart and mind into a noble cause he has thought was worth dying for, Ricky walks the streets of the city, recently the site of a furious battle between activists and police, confused and hurt and angry. The answer to the question which he so glibly asked in the past is no longer satisfactory. Activism, as the novel argues, and its attendant use of violence and force will not answer the people's desire for justice. Like any other movements, it will devour its own children in a never-ending cycle of power struggle.

A number of Lingat's short stories echo the same preoccupation with society about to explode because people and institutions conspire with one another to exploit the already marginalized majority. For example, "Ang Piring" explains, in no uncertain terms, the reasons for the pervasive lack of justice in the land.⁷ The story deals with a security guard, witness to an attempted kidnapping of a girl by a senator's son, the terror inflicted on him and his family by hired goons, his eventual liquidation, and the flight of his wife and daughter from the home they have learned to love. In "Kung Saan Namamatay ang mga Inosente" (*Liwayway*, 25 September 1972), is focussed on a human rights lawyer, and his attempts to bring justice to the slain family consisting of a mother and her three children, whose house has been razed to the ground by the mayor's son. Believing that only by bringing this heinous and unspeakable crime to the people's attention can any change be introduced, even at a slow pace, Lauro begins his crusade. But even before he is able to make his exposé, he is shot to death by a hired killer. In "Mapagkanulong Daigdig" (*Liwayway*, 19 January 1969, pp. 3, 5), it is not an institution that destroys helpless individuals but a woman who preys on young women driven to ask her help. The narrative details the cycle of trust and betrayal that two sisters undergo at the hands of a procuress who, in the name of money, lures innocent victims to a life of prostitution.

In the above-mentioned works, Lingat shows how deeply indebted she is to a tradition that has shaped much of Philippine literature,

where craft is utilized to delineate the cause and effects of institutionalized poverty and violence. By imaging a vast system consisting of interlocking institutions that work against the individual, she has followed the footsteps of some of the more significant social realists, from Faustino Aguilar to Lazaro Francisco. That she wrote those texts at the height of activism is important because her works partook of the social realist framework of the period.

This is not to say, however, that she was merely following a fad, for this period witnessed the tremendous influence of Maoism among the writers and Lingat herself participated in the PAKSA-sponsored workshops.⁶ That she had reservations regarding the relevance of Marxist doctrine to her craft was demonstrated by her insistence that movements that espoused violence would be exposed for what they really were. This was a thesis in *Ano Ngayon, Ricky?* where the charismatic professor is exposed as an unabashed Communist follower with a son studying in Russia.

At the same time, however, her almost plaintive depiction of various forms of suffering appears to reach out, crying for relief and cessation from pain. If the solution is not to be found in any movement, where can society go? Unlike some of her contemporaries, she refuses to acknowledge, in the guise of tendentious writing, the importance of the movement. Throughout her writing, the reader discerns a potent form of skepticism that prevents her from offering predictable solutions to the human predicament. Lingat, as it were, strives through her texts to grapple with her constructs of the world and never for the moment gives the illusion that the world will be transformed. In this way, Lingat is different from her contemporaries who in their writing almost always automatically provide an ending where contradictions are glossed over and where traditional values reign supreme in a transfigured world. Always, there is a final question that the protagonist or the narrator poses, for which there is no single answer. The violence is never for a moment stilled, and it rages until the reading has been completed.

Of Women, Love and Desire

Where the stories delineating various forms of societal violence are drawn in big, bold strokes, Lingat's other stories, especially those which revolve around women and the roles they have been assigned to play in society, are executed in a terse, impressionistic interplay of light and shadow where the lines are barely glimpsed. Neverthe-

less, these texts are as impressive as the more socially conscious narratives, as the excesses of a polemical tone are muted and transformed into a quiet but provocative discourse centered on woman and her desires.

"Villa Reynoso" (*Filipino Free Press*, January 1966) deals with a predictable motif where rich girl marries poor boy and is unceremoniously disowned for dishonoring a noble lineage. But the narrative is raised several notches higher by a masterful study of its female characters, notably Doña Carmen, the mother who is dying, and her willful, disobedient daughter Imelda. As the old woman lies dying, the narrative conflates the past and present through the voice of Imelda who comes back, in sorrowful indignation, to her dying mother.

When her husband needed help, Imelda had begged her family for some aid but her pleas fell on deaf ears. When he died, she became a nightclub hostess rather than return to her family and once again be humiliated by an arrogant family. She has returned, still smarting from her anger and disappointment, and finds out that her mother has planted another *caimito* tree, a symbol that the old woman has understood the folly of her action.

Although ostensibly about familial ties and dying, the story thus becomes a narrative celebrating life and offering a testimony to the righteousness of Imelda's act in the pursuit of her love. The victim of class antagonism, unrepentant until the end, is unequivocally affirmed as the story ends.

Despite the reconciliation effected between Imelda and her dying mother, the story is still basically a narrative where woman is perceived as a prisoner of her own class, and a victim of those who hold the preeminence of this class. In another story, "Isang Patunguhan" (Reyes 1994, 201-9), Luisa is trapped in a more untenable position where desire is aborted by values perceived as higher than personal happiness.

Luisa is a thirty-year-old woman engaged to be married to Adel, a businessman who insists that she has to stay with him in Davao. Secure in the belief that her younger sister Nita will take care of their sick parents, Luisa agrees to marry Adel who, at this point, is being pursued by Marita, a beautiful widow. Luisa finds out that Nita has left for the States with Jun and realizes that she cannot marry Adel. The classic dilemma is spelled out in a scene charged with much emotion:

"At dahil doon, hindi na tayo makakasal?"

"Paano ang aking mga magulang? Matatanda na sila, may sakit. Ako na lamang ang kanilang inaasahan. Nasabi ko na sa iyo, ayaw silang sumama sa Davao. Dito sila inanak, dito naganap ang lalong mahahalagang bahagi ng kanilang buhay. Dito na rin nila ibig magwakas ang buhay na iyan. Paano ko sila iiwan?"

"Paano naman ako? Ikaw?"

("And because of that, won't we ever get married?")

"What about my parents? They are old, and sick. I am the only one they can depend on. I told you, they won't come to Davao. They were born here; this is where the major events in their lives took place. They would like to die here. How can I leave them?"

"What about me? You?"

Adel leaves the house disheartened and disappointed. Luisa's father asks her to follow him and follow her heart. Luisa runs after Adel only to find out that he has left for Davao with Marita who is more than willing to marry him.

Luisa returns to the dark house, a cavern-like structure, ready to swallow her up in its fatal embrace. Desire must give way to filial piety, that cherished ideal which compels an individual to sacrifice personal happiness for the sake of the other. When Adel bids her goodbye, Luisa is terrified at the idea of being utterly alone.

Nag-iisa na siya sa malaki, malungkot na kabahayan na iyong itinayo ng kanyang ama. Nasa mga sulok na ang anino ng takipsilim. Kinilabutan siya. Sa unang pagkakataon, nakaramdam siya ng takot ng pag-iisa. Binuksan niya ang pinto, wari'y ibig pang papasukin, kahit saglit, ang panghuling liwanag ng araw. Sumaboy sa kanyang mukha ang ulan. Sinuyod ng mata ang abot-tanaw. Wala na si Adel.

(She is all alone in the large and sad house built by her father. The shadows of impending twilight penetrate its corners. She shivered. For the first time, she experienced fear, of being alone. She opened the door, as if she wanted the sun to come in, even for a brief moment. The last rays of the sun. A burst of raindrops splayed her face. She scanned the horizon. Adel is gone.)

By positioning and thus framing Luisa against a sense of indescribable loss tinged with terror, as the rains spray her face, the point of view unambiguously problematizes a basic belief borne out of

reverence for familial ties. An exceedingly sad conclusion must end this narrative as Luisa runs her hand through her mother's hair, committed to stay with her parents until their death. When before she could hum a tune, Luisa now finds herself unable to sing to her mother.

More than any of Lingat's other stories made to revolve around parent-child relationships, it is "Isang Patunguhan" which problematizes a common view of a daughter, the older of two sisters, as duty bound to stay at her parents' side. Nita, the younger sister whom Luisa sent through school, abandons Luisa and in the gesture destroys Luisa's only chance at happiness. The graphic use of details in the story, evoking a particular mood of intense loneliness and anguish, has been put to good use in objectifying what Luisa thinks and feels in these moments of her life. That she is a woman imprisoned in and unable to escape her destiny (the title is indicative of this view) is the clearest image arising from this hauntingly beautiful love story. Her lost opportunity is paralleled, as the story ends, when she is rendered voiceless and unable to sing her songs, the daughter's lullaby, to her dying mother.

In "Mapagkanulong Daigdig," "Villa Reynoso" and "Isang Patunguhan," the female character appears unable to escape from the system of values that has shaped society, whether related to class or familial relationships. In the first story, a female procurer who preys on innocent, helpless young women is clearly the villain of the piece. In the second story, it is a whole family clinging to beliefs shaped by class that the female protagonist has to contend with. In the last story, the heroine is given a chance at freedom and personal happiness but chooses instead to remain a dutiful daughter to aging, helpless parents.

In "Ang Pinid na Pinto" (*Liwayway*, 12 September 1966), Lingat creatively examines the complex relationship between father and daughter and the values to which they subscribe by force of tradition. The narrative revolves around Benilda, the young wife of Efren, and her gradual discovery of the intricate web of relationship between Tandang Aryong and his daughters Nana Idad and Nana Oryang. The central image in the text is the mysterious closed door which Benilda sees, and which she eventually explores one evening after having seen the door in her nightmare and after having sensed that there is some mystery that shrouds the whole house and its inhabitants.

Benilda's first sight of the two elderly women and their father immediately positions her in a state of great anxiety. Words

unexpressed and unconscious gestures point to the pervasive presence of fear and anxiety in the two sisters. Her initial encounter with the old man reinforces her feeling that despite his age and sickness, he is the master of this house; there is no room for doubt.

The story behind the closed door is finally unfolded as Benilda learns about the events that took place during the Second World War and which involved the family of Tandang Aryong. The disclosure follows when she finally succeeds in opening the mysterious door and sees, to her horror, the remains of a man. The man was Jeffrey Haines, an American soldier they took into their house to save him from the Japanese soldiers. He fell in love with Idad and when they were discovered making love by Tandang Aryong, the old man decided that they should get married. One day, Tandang Aryong came home and informed them that the Japanese were undertaking a house-to-house search for guerilla soldiers. Fearing for the safety of their lives of his daughters, he ordered them to go to Manila while he and Jeff would stay behind and think of a plan to save the latter. When the daughters came back, they were informed that Jeff had been caught and subsequently killed by the Japanese. It was upon their return that they saw the room completely sealed off. Nobody sought an answer to the mystery.

With the discovery of the skeleton, the truth is finally revealed. Tandang Aryong had murdered Jeff because the latter, even before marrying Idad had already seduced Orang, and had tried to do so again after he had been married. In a fit of anger at this betrayal, Tandang Aryong killed the son-in-law to whom the family had shown nothing but compassion and kindness. He was the avenging angel who must seek act decisively to put an end to the life of this venomous snake (an *ulupong*). He asks forgiveness and Idad, torn between conflicting emotions, affirms what Benilda has sensed from the very beginning: the father as the source of the law and the instrument of revenge. She says:

"Ano man ang ginawa ninyo, Itay, tama o mali, alam kong ginawa ninyo iyon na taglay ang paniniwalang iyon ang higit na mabuti para sa amin ng inyong mga anak."

("Whatever you did, Father, whether right or wrong, you did it fully convinced that that was for the best interest of us, your children.")

In the end, the story that started off as a Gothic-like account of an innocent woman's initiation into the mysteries of a closed door

is transformed into a narrative of love and desire, where the system of patriarchy is reinforced and justified by its own victim. Like the protagonist in "Isang Patunguhan", Idad allows herself to be acted upon by a force much stronger than herself and in the process finds herself denied the chance to fulfill her desire.

Two other stories problematize this view of woman as pathetic victim—helplessly bound to old values and unable to draw strength from her inner self. Lingat's prize-winning "Estero" (*Pilipino Free Press*, 1 March 1967) is perhaps one of her more honest depictions of raging sexuality as experienced by a plain thirty-one-year old seamstress who thinks of herself as indifferent to love. The story begins with a graphic depiction of the short journey that Sidra, the protagonist, must take to get her house where she and her grandmother live:

Upang makarating sa kanilang tahanan, kailangan niyang dumaan sa tulay na kahoy na timatawid sa mabahong estero, na may maitim at malapot na putik na pinamumugaran ng lamok at kung anu-anong nagkitaw-kitaw, Tatakpan niya ng panyo ang kanyang ilong pagtawid niya sa tulay, at ito ang magpapasimula sa kumukutyang tawanan ng mga istambay na tulad ng mga lamok at kung anu-anong namumugad sa esterong nasa ilalim ay lagi namang nangakapulupot sa gilid at gabay ng tulay.

(To get to their house, she has to cross the wooden bridge over the foul-smelling *estero*, its blackish and thick mud swarming with mosquitoes and other insects. She will cover her nose with a handkerchief as she negotiates the distance, and this will provoke much laughter from the men who, like the mosquitoes and other creatures that inhabit the estero, just love to hang around the side of the bridge.)

Sidra has nothing but contempt for these denizens, the jobless young men who never fail to throw sexist remarks everytime they see her. The *estero* is not a place but a way of life from which Sidra would like to escape someday. But the estero, as the story shows, is the site for desire she has thought she is oblivious to, but does manage to assert itself with impunity. Sidra feels desire stirring within her at the sight of Brando, one of the young men she thinks she despises with all her heart.

Brando, the virile twenty-two-year old, starts to haunt her even as he tries to strike up a conversation with her and even invites her to go out with him. He stays outside her house, a lit cigaret in his

mouth, staring at her room with smouldering gaze and a smile on his lips. Her reaction is violent at the sight of Brando:

Napaurong siya. Pakiramdam niya'y nawawala ang mga tuhod niya. Sumandal sa isang dinding, inabot ang pihitan ng ilaw. Nagdilim ang silid, Padapang ibinagsak ang katawan sa ibabaw ng kama.

"Hindi! Hindi!" At nag-init ang luha sa mga mata. Pinagsusuntok ang kinasubsubang unan.

Kung bakit hindi. Kung ano ang hindi, ay hindi niya maipaliwanag sa kanyang sarili.

(She found herself involuntarily taking a step backward. She felt as if her knees had turned numb. She leaned against the wooden wall, groped for the switch. The room was plunged in darkness. She threw herself on the bed.

"No! No!" And her eyes smarted with her tears. She started to hit the pillow with her fist.

Why she said "no" and what "no" meant were things she could not explain to herself.)

The desire overwhelms her and one evening, she goes to his *barung-barong*, turning her back on what has been taught her, forgetting how much she hates people like Brando. Trembling with anxiety, she pushes the door open and hears the movement within and a woman's angry voice. She runs away, humiliated by what has happened. Now what she wants is to die even as she is suffused with self-loathing. She notices that her slippers are gone, her feet mired in the estero's mud.

This story is disturbing because it is an agitated narrative which fails in the end to reconcile its varied contradictions. Sidra thinks she knows what the proper attitude should be towards the ugly place and its inhabitants. She fancies herself superior to them and demonstrates it by refusing to have anything to do with the people there. In like manner, desire is something she thinks she does not possess, in a series of self-delusions and rationalizations.

Brando, the brazen squatter and the only one bold enough to call attention to the simmering desire within her, is the embodiment of the way of life practised in the estero. He stirs the long pent-up sexual desire she has unsuccessfully sought to contain, wakes it up and compels her to confront it, against her will. She goes one step forward and throwing caution to the wind seeks the quenching of

the desire by going to Brando's hut only to find out that Brando has ruthlessly exploited her own weakness.

As the story ends, Sidra finds herself humbled and humiliated by the turn of events; both desire and ego have been crushed. She is left with nothing but anger and frustration. She will have to live with desire and the estero, one complementing the other. Her antiseptic and make-believe world, where she is superior to everybody by virtue of her job (she is a seamstress and is thus gainfully employed) and her refusal to be a slave to desire, is shattered with finality. "Estero" charts the female protagonist's lonely journey to self-knowledge, and the pain that must accompany that journey.

In "Talaarawan ng Isang Babae" (*Liwayway*, 6 June 1977), Lingat constructs a tale of woman pitting herself against a man, ostensibly losing out to him as he rapes her, but eventually gets her revenge as he realizes how powerful his victim really is. This is one of the few works of Lingat that masterfully delineate the power struggle that goes on, at various levels, between men and women.

The male character is Darmono, a braggart who thrives on his own tales of his numerous sexual escapades and thinks that by doing so, he affirms his own masculinity and prowess in bed that women find irresistible. He swears to seduce Karla, an illustrator for an advertising agency, in response to his friends' challenge. Darmono's persistence falls on deaf ears and Darmono finally feels the need to rape her. He succeeds in what he has set out to do when he forcibly enters Karla's apartment and systematically beats her up and rapes her.

Darmono then sees a diary and he starts to read a moving account of Karla's past, and how she fought against all odds when she fell in love with Rod, a musician who had stayed in Vietnam. She ran away from home and sought Rod out. She wondered why Rod refused to take her and why his eyes were brimming with tears when he rejected her. Rod gave her the reason but that was not enough to dissuade her from her intense love for the man.

Mahal ko si Rod, kahit ano pa. Hindi ba iyon ang pag-ibig? Magkasama sa ligaya, magkasalo sa dusa. Nagtatawa ang iba ngunit iyon ang aking nadarama. At naunawaan niya ako. Ngayon, hindi na kami estranghero sa isa't isa.

(I love Rod, whatever happens. Is that not love? Joined together in joy, together in pain. Others may laugh, but that is how I feel. And he understood me. Now, we are no longer strangers to each other.)

Karla knew the risk she was taking and decided that everything was worth losing for a night of love and passion. Rod died and to Darmono's horror, he realized that Rod had infected Karla with a sexually-transmitted disease for which no cure had been found. Before Karla dies, she tells the horror-stricken rapist:

Pinili natin ang ating kamatayan, Darmono. Dapat tayong mamatay na maligaya.

(We chose our own kind of death, Darmono. We should die happy.)

The intense but transitory quality of romantic love is embodied in Karla, her love for Rod and her willingness to confront death. Her diary is an account of love's passion and delight, its torment and joy. Juxtaposed against this narrative is Darmono's own selfish views of himself and his relationship with women. Ostensibly successful in defeating Karla, he realizes in the end that it is she who triumphs. The love she had freely given to Rod, which caused her death, Darmono can never attain for himself. Instead, his violence has merely triggered the certainty of his own death. Thwarted desire and certain death are Darmono's final condition. Karla has the last word and she declares that she is happy. The unspoken words, the absence behind the presence, could only come from Darmono who will die unhappy and miserable. Karla experienced Eros while her torturer will live haunted by the realization that he will never approximate Karla's experience of life in death.

In the novel *Kung Wala na ang Tag-araw* (Liwayway 1969), a sustained inquiry into the nature of desire and passion is situated against the context of familial duties and responsibilities. The necessary tension between these two claims shapes a remarkable narrative revolving around a male protagonist, Victor, and the different women who played crucial roles in his life. Though ostensibly about an amorous heart desirous of happiness and excitement, *Kung Wala na ang Tag-araw* is also about female characters and how they affirm and negate certain images society has constructed of and imposed on them.

The novel's opening scene is set in the yearly carnival of festive mood and colorful disguises. This is the site where love among the young knows no barrier—not family, not class, not values—and where impulse remains unchecked. Victor, the male protagonist, is the love-smitten one; the object of his desire is Anastacia. They elope in the midst of the heady atmosphere of the carnival and realize a couple of years later how illusions have a way of masking reality.

Victor gets to think hard about the possibility of having a relationship outside marriage by taking to heart his friend's Eking musings on love and happiness. Asked by Victor why he has a mistress, Eking replies:

Bakit ko ginagawa ito? Simple lang ang sagot. Tao ako. At sinong tao ang hindi kaligayahan ang hangad sa buhay na ito? Maikli ang buhay, Victor. Lalong maikli ang kabataan. Hindi mo namamalayan, lumilipas ang mga taon, at tinatangay nito ang iyong kabataan. Bago mo malaman, wala na ang lakas, ang init, ang sigla ng iyong katawan. Tapos na ang tag-araw sa iyong buhay

.....
Ibig kong samantalain ang aking tag-araw. Natatakot akong isipin na ito'y natapos na hindi naipagkaloob ang dapat na maging akin. Kung ito'y wala na, ayaw kong ang mga gunita nito'y malipos ng mga *sana*. Isang trahedya ang buhay kapag nagkagayon. Magwawakas sa paghahangad ng hindi na magbabalik. Kaya ngayon pa'y pinipili ko na ang aking landas. Ibig kong ito'y maging maligaya, maningning na luluwalhati sa bawat araw ng buhay ko.

(Why am I doing this? The answer is simple. I am human. Who does not have happiness in life as a goal? Life is brief, Victor. Youth is much briefer. You are not even aware, but time passes by, taking away with it your youth. Before you know it, there is nothing left of your strength, your passion, your body's energy. Summer has faded away.

.....
I would like to enjoy the summer of my life. I fear that it would end without granting me what is rightfully mine. I would not want my memories of summer replete with *ifs*, when it is finally gone. That will be tragic if it happens. Ending in desires that will never come back. I would like it to be gloriously happy, lending luminosity to each day of my life.)

Finding his marriage unexciting, and influenced by Eking's espousal of the *carpe diem* philosophy, Victor goes ahead and plunges in an affair with Carmela, a teacher who falls in love with him not knowing that he is married. What follows is a succession of affairs: with his secretary Teresa, with Isabel, the wife of his friend, and in his later years, with Gina, a hostess who eventually leaves him to get married to a jeepney driver.

Anastacia tries to bear his infidelities with heroic fortitude in the tradition of the suffering wife who will accept this humiliation for the sake of the children. However, she reaches a point, after Victor's

prolonged stay in Baguio with his mistress Teresa, when she decides to leave for Mindanao with her mother who, from the very beginning, has had serious reservations about Victor's character. Anastacia then becomes the absence which will haunt Victor the rest of his life, even as he continues to search for his happiness in the arms of other women.

Despite the mother's absence brought about by their father's mockery of marriage, the children grow up with little resentment against their father. As he grows older Victor starts to realize the follies of his ways. Once, when he watches his son Luisito effortlessly tugging at his kite to keep it from breaking loose into the sky, Victor muses:

. . . Ganyan nga, ang nasa isip niya, matuto kang pumigil, magpalipad, at mag-utos sa saranggolang iyan. Kung saan dako dapat lumpiad, at sumunod sa hatak mo, masupil kahit nagpipilit lumipad sa ibang dulo. Sa aba kapag nakawala ang saranggolang iyan: Sisikapin niya ang marating ang kalawakang walang hanggan. Upang durog na ilugmok lamang sa lupa ng kabiguan . . . Sa ibang araw, matututuhan mong ganyan din ang damdamin, ang pag-ibig, poot, paghahangad at lungkot; kailangan mong ang mga ito'y itali at pigilan upang hindi makaalpas sa paghahanap ng kasiyahan walang hantungan. Mapalad sila na marunong sumupil sa mga damdamin; makikilala nila ang kasiyahan at damdamin ng kapangyarihang tanging ang mahusay magpalipad ng saranggola ang umaangkin.

(. . . That is how it should be, he thought, learn how to rein it in, to let it fly, and to dominate it. Wherever it should fly, and be pulled back, be controlled though it rages to fly to the other end. It's a pity if that kite were to break loose: It will aim for boundless space. Only to find itself, a broken heap, in a world of failure. . . . You will find out, in the future, that the same goes in the world of feelings; love, hatred, desire and sorrow: you have to control and rein them in so that they would not slip through your fingers in their search for endless pleasure. Lucky are those who know how to regulate their feelings; to them will be given the happiness and feeling of power that only those who skillfully fly their kites can claim as rightfully theirs.)

Victor realizes the frenetic pursuit of happiness and fulfillment only leads to disillusionment and despair. He understands the need to rein in his passion but is nonetheless unable to do it and ends up like a broken kite falling to the ground after being buffeted by the wind as it soared high into the heavens.

The passage of time in the novel is marked by a series of events that happen to each of his children. His son dies as a soldier in the Pacific War. Claudia, one of his three daughters, elopes with a man

who finally deserts her, leaving her life shattered to pieces. Unable to recover the fragments of herself, she gets sick and eventually succumbs to a broken heart. She asks her father:

Ang kasalanan ko, kung kasalanan nga, ay ang umibig ng buong kawagasan. Bakit kailangang pagdusahan ko ang pagkagahaman ng isang lalaki?

(My sin, if indeed it was a sin, was to love deeply. Why must I suffer from a man's greed?)

To this Victor is not able to say anything. The sins of the father have indeed been visited upon their children.

Julia, the eldest daughter takes care of the father and becomes his comforter. Her fate is shared by numerous eldest children: forego marriage for the sake of the family. She provides the necessary certainty in the tumultuous life of her father, always seeking to understand the mysterious urgings which her father is still prey to in old age. Peace finally comes to Victor after undergoing a nervous breakdown and after accidentally shooting himself. In the fight between life and death, life wins out and Anastacia, the suppressed presence, returns to a husband whose insatiable desire drove her away from her family and her responsibility. The ending is framed by Anastacia's observation that summer has ended and that the rain has started to fall on the parched earth. Half-conscious,

Victor hears the raindrops on the roof and muses:

Kahanga-hanga ang ulan, ang nasa isip niya, nagagawa nitong maghilom ang mga biak ng tuyong lupa, upang ito'y pumintig sa pagbabagong-buhay. . .

(How wonderful the rain, he thought, it heals the scorched dryness of the earth, so it can pulsate with renewed life. . .)

Although Anastacia appears only in the novel's first chapters, she is the formidable absence against which all the other female characters in the story must be evaluated. Her love for Victor is treated in a complex manner, even as she, in the name of love, seeks to preserve her self-respect by withdrawing from her family. She possesses all the desirable qualities usually expected from a woman—fidelity to her vows, steadfastness, concern for her family, the ability to forgive. She is also in possession of a strong will and the desire to

maintain her dignity short of being accused as an undesirable mother and wife. The reader is constantly reminded of her through her letters to her children, even as Victor is depicted in the throes of guilt for his desperate quest for permanence.

In the end, Victor admits the futility of this search for intense pleasure. In the process, his name affirms the ironic mode with which the term has been utilized throughout the narrative. Indeed, to seek permanence is to clutch at imaginary straws, the novel's ending seems to suggest. All the other women in his life cannot equal the important role his wife Anastacia has played in his life, from the exhilarating events of the carnival through his many sorrows and pain, and finally, his acceptance of old age in the twilight of his years.

Conclusion

The world constituted in Rosario de Guzman Lingat's discourse is filled with texts which appear to revolve around the major narrative. Any quest for meaning, or any form of certitude for that matter, is fraught with difficulties and must remain an open-ended journey. The various individuals in her texts, defined by their historical specificities and particular positions in a system of values and beliefs, must, nonetheless, undertake the quest lest they atrophy and lead a life without meaning. Courage is their most distinctive characteristic which enables them to withstand the savagings heaped on them by societal and familial forces, or even by the beasts within.

In perspective, Lingat's fiction, whether dealing with remembrances of the past or with the pressing issues of the day, with misguided youthful idealism, or with old people's despair and disillusionment, startles because it not only engages the emotions, but, as importantly, provokes the mind. Hers is not a series of artfully-crafted works that unabashedly call attention to their exquisite artistry although it is difficult to dismiss the masterful way Lingat has handled various elements of fiction to construct her fictive world. What is paramount is the seriousness and deliberateness with which the writer has cultivated and refined her art in order to throw light into the chaos which life is, to impose some order (albeit temporary) to recalcitrant realities she has chosen to interpret.

More than any of her female contemporaries, Lingat has demonstrated how a writer can harness her craft to express her own understanding of the world which is incomprehensible and appears

almost boundless. She has carefully chosen certain themes, created variations on them, not to preach (where she is most tendentious, the stories tend to falter) but to hold a mirror, dark and obscure, for the readers to see and eventually for them to remember the welter of images and impressions.

By constant repetition, and Lingat frames and reframes recurring images in a complex and sometimes dazzling tissue of repetitions—verbal, situational, motifs and thematic—she structures not only her works but their multiple relationships to what is outside the texts.

To read Lingat's novels and short stories as reflections of the world is, as suggested earlier, rather naive. What the texts have done is not to point to the world as we know it but rather to reveal the author's network of remembrance and reconstruction of both the past and the present. Indeed, a significant aspect of Lingat's fiction is her almost obsessive preoccupation with the past insofar as it can help the reader make some sense of the present.

A controlling metaphor in most of her stories, therefore, is the war, imaged in diverse ways as one of the most significant events that have shaped Philippine society. In two novels, and even in her short stories, the metaphor helps to generate meanings in an otherwise absurd universe. Perhaps, it is but proper that this metaphor has been consistently employed by Lingat in her fiction because through this image of dissension, conflict and unending and oftentimes futile struggle, the author has found an appropriate symbol for Philippine society, then and now, as a country perpetually at war, fragmented and fractious, and unable to see beyond the surface of things.

In the fiction of Rosario de Guzman Lingat, the sound the reader hears is not raucous, the color one perceives is not garish, the tone one detects is not abrasive. In the encounter between the texts and the reader, what transpires is an unfolding of Lingat's many selves which each text painstakingly creates.

Writing her novels and short stories within less than two decades, Rosario de Guzman Lingat reached a peak which is unparalleled in the history of Philippine Literature in Filipino in the second half of the twentieth century. Her writing, sustained by tremendous creativity, is a testimony to her outstanding achievement not only as a insightful chronicler of history but as importantly, as a significant female voice whose works have allowed the space reserved for less than familiar themes to be widened. To valorize her is the least Philippine Literature can do to such a brilliant creator of a complex fictive world.

Notes

1. A number of female authors in England and Europe such as George Sand, George Eliot, the Bronte Sisters, at least in the nineteenth century, could not publish using their own names. It is instructive to point out, however, that as early as the eighteenth century, there were a lot of female writers especially in the field of the novel who used their own names. See Spenser (1986, 3–11).

2. In the Philippines, women who started to write in the first decades of the twentieth century published their novels and poems using their own names as in the case of Fausta Cortes, Rosalia Aguinaldo, Filomena Alcanar, among others.

3. Very few women writers were given recognition by male editors and critics in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The exceptions were Rosalia Aguinaldo and the Arceo sisters, Liwayway and Corazon, in the 1940s. For this reason, most of the literature textbooks featured mostly works of male authors.

4. *Talambuhay*, typescript, n.d.

5. Reception theories have reinstated the importance of the reading act and the impact of the text on the reader as a creator of meanings. See, for example, the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, Roman Ingarden, among others.

6. "Ang Espiya," Collection of Rosario de Guzman Lingat's Stories, typescript, n.d.

7. "Ang Piring," in Collection of Rosario de Guzman Lingat's Stories, typescript, n.d.

8. PAKSA (*Panulat Para sa Kaunlaran ng Sambayanan*) was founded in 1971 after a series of demonstrations and protests staged by progressive writers. For a lively account of the founding of PAKSA, see Almario (1984, 265–74).

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