

# philippine studies

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## **Theme and Technique in the Short Stories of Liwayway A. Arceo, 1941-1950**

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 42, no. 1 (1994): 39–62

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Theme and Technique in the Short Stories of Liwayway A. Arceo from 1941–1950

*Lolita Rodriguez Lacuesta*



The student of Tagalog Literature cannot ignore the name Liwayway A. Arceo. She is among the better known Tagalog writers, and certainly has been a prolific and popular one. Her writing career started in 1941 and continues to the present, covering a span of fifty-odd years. It started auspiciously with her winning the Second Prize in the contest "25 Pinakamahusay na Maikling Kuwento ng 1943," two years after she started writing. The contest was launched by Liwayway Publications, and her story was "Uhaw Ang Tigang na Lupa," published 8 May in *Liwayway* magazine in the year of the contest. Only nineteen years old at the time, she bested veteran writers like N. V. M. Gonzalez, Macario Pineda, and Emilio A. Cruz.

Ten years later in 1952, Liwayway A. Arceo was honored by the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa as "Kuwentistang Babae ng Taon." Twenty years later, in 1962, she won First Prize in the Palanca Contest Short Story division. Her winning piece was "Banyaga," published 12 May in that year in *Evening News*.<sup>1</sup>

This article will deal with the stories of the first decade of Liwayway A. Arceo's writing career, which I call her Short Story Period. Ninety-nine stories published in different magazines from 1941 to 1950 comprise this collection, which is in the private papers of the author. However, while the collection is the author's and therefore can be presumed to be complete, there is some doubt as to whether the ninety-nine short stories are all the author wrote during this first decade. There is mention of stories published in 1941 which are not represented in the collection. For instance, the author remembers that her first published short story was titled "Mahal Kong Edo," published in 1941, but there is no copy of this work in her collection. In addition, some of her clippings of her stories do not have magazine titles and page numbers or dates, which is why some of the entries in the appended bibliography are incomplete.

## The Short Story Themes

What must be kept in mind when one reads the stories of this first decade of Arceo's writing career is that this was the formative period of the writer. Naturally, it was also a period of experimentation. Hence the ninety-nine stories are varied in subject matter as well as technique. We have stories in the diary form such as "Uhaw Ang Tigang na Lupa" (1943), epistolary stories such as "Lihim" (1949), and unabashedly sentimental stories such as "Mga Matang Kulay Duhat" (1948) and "Bughaw Ang Langit Bukas" (1950). We also have literary monologues such as "Muling Pagkabuhay" (1946). "Babae" (1948) is composed of speeches strung together with no expository material whatsoever. The writer is obviously still in the process of finding her style and experimenting with the different themes and techniques possible to her. It is important to note also that at this time the writer was in her late teens and early to middle twenties, and therefore of a mindset peculiar to women of these ages. Thus, a reading of the short stories of this first decade will bring out themes and subject matter that keep recurring in the stories. The first part of this article pinpoints the themes and then illustrates them with the stories themselves. The themes are the theme of love, the theme of the strength of woman as against the weakness of man, the theme of the artist as hero, and the theme of the child as the innocent observer of and witness to the action of adults. There are, of course, many variations of these themes and they overlap in some stories. The second part of this article discusses the techniques the young Arceo uses to surface these themes.

### The Theme of Love

*Pag-ibig* is of course the fountainhead of every other Tagalog story. Tagalog writers, from Balagtas to the most cynical *estero* writer today, have not ceased mining this theme and it is safe to say that there has been no Tagalog writer, dead or alive, who did not at one time or another attempt to explore its pains and mysteries. Liway-way A. Arceo is not exempt from this predilection. Of the ninety-nine stories, about 70 percent are of *pag-ibig* and its many forms: lost loves, sacrificing loves, frustrated loves and, of course, triumphant loves.

"Naunsiyami" (1945), "Mula sa Kabila ng Daigdig" (1946), "Krus, Saglit ng Kabanalan" (1943), and "Umiiyak ang Ninang Ko" (1941),

are, as their titles suggest, only some of these stories of lost love. The last is most outstanding in the group. It is also one of Arceo's earliest stories. It is written from a child's point of view, and presents a single situation: a little girl is sitting on the lap of a man named Badong under the shade of a huge tree, and chatters away as only an innocent little girl can. She first tells Badong, whom we later realize is an *herbolario*, about lately seeing her *ninang* crying most of the time. She tells this to Badong in the most innocent reportorial manner, then proceeds to wonder why this is so when Tony, the son of Don Julio, "yung may malaking kotse" comes to visit her, and her mother only seems too happy to receive him. Perhaps Badong should see her *ninang* and put some leaves on her back the way he did last time? Her *ninang* seemed happy after Badong came to cure her of her fever last time. Now she even refuses to eat. Once, when she asked her *ninang's* mother why she was crying all the time, the mother replied it was because her *ninang* was getting married, and the tears she sheds are tears of joy.

The girl's chatter is abruptly stopped when she feels a drop of rain on her forehead. Surprised, she looks up to see no other drops of rain. She then turns to see Badong crying. She is surprised: "Ikakasal ka rin ba? Ha Badong? Ha? Badong?" And so the story ends.

Through the girl's incessant chatter—cut only by thoughts of Badong set in parentheses—we learn of the sufferings of her *ninang*, as the mother forces her to marry a man she doesn't love, a man her mother chooses for her because of his wealth and prominence. Badong doesn't speak but when he lets his tears flow, we know it is Badong the girl's *ninang* truly loves. We know, too, that Badong isn't going to try to fight for their love. His falling tear is a symbol of his acceptance of defeat, a defeat made even more pronounced by the irony of the little girl's mistaking it for tears of joy at a prospective marriage.

Love in Arceo's stories of this period can be triumphant though, as in "Kuwento Kay Noli" (1946), "Mga Matang Kulay Duhat" (1948), "Batang Tondo" (1948), "Ito Ang Pag-ibig" (1950), and the humorous "Nakaluluwa ang Anak na Dalaga" (1948). The last appeared in the All Soul's Day issue of *Liwayway* in 1948. Again, the point of view is that of a young girl, and this time the girl is retelling a favorite uncle's favorite story which he tells practically every time All Soul's Day comes around. It tells of how her uncle compromised his ladylove, daughter of strict parents, into marriage with him. The ladylove is now the girl's aunt, and this fact, plus the

overtones of the word *nakaluluwa* invests the story with humor, which is a frequent ingredient in the stories of Arceo. "Nakaluluwa," of course, inspires memories of tales of chickens disappearing in the night while the folk keep vigil in cemeteries, and to equate the ladylove with chickens stolen in the night makes one smile, as one does at the end of the story.

Again, we have a single situation. Here is this young man, in love with possibly the most beautiful woman in the world, but he can't make headway because of strict parents and the usual *pakipot* required of the *dalagang Filipina*. So what is he to do? He waits for All Soul's Day. When the girl's turn to keep vigil comes, he waits for her to get tired, and then convinces her to allow him to bring her home. The cemetery is by now crawling with people and transportation is hard to come by but, lo and behold, a *calesa* comes out of the shadows and he gallantly helps her up into the calesa to bring her home—but not quite. She perceives the different direction they are taking, but it is too late. She is too embarrassed to tell the driver to turn back—and reveal thereby that she is neither wife nor sister of the man she is with in the middle of the night—and too afraid to get off and go home alone and be found out to have gone on a calesa ride with a member of the opposite sex. The latter is just not done by self-respecting Filipinas. To make the story short, she ends up married to the man, with the news reverberating around the whole town: "Nakaluluwa ang anak ni Mang Juan Rayuma." (Note that the family name translates into "rheumatism" in English.)

A large number of Arceo's stories of this period deals with the self-sacrificing kind of love. Among the more memorable ones are the stories that feature the eternal triangle. The most remarkable fact about these stories is that Arceo's other women are not always the *kontrabida* that Tagalog literature makes of them most of the time. Her other women are complex, even sympathetic, personalities who are deeply human and capable of even the greatest sacrifice of giving up the men they love.

Matilde Castner in "Bagong Magdalena" (1949) is one such other woman. A singer in a club, Matilde has been living with Alfredo Rayo for some twelve years when the story opens. The story is told from the third person point of view. She has just finished singing a song, and is waiting for Alfredo to pick her up from the club. While she is blissfully thinking of the past and how they met, she sees a young girl of about seventeen enter the club. The girl asks for her, and Matilde invites her to her room. The girl soon points to the

clothes hanging in Matilde's closet and reveals her mission. She wants to see for herself the woman who has changed their lives and caused her mother's suffering through the years. Finally, the girl begs Matilde to let her father go. Her mother is gravely ill, and needs him. The story ends with Matilde packing Alfredo's clothes and giving them to the girl and, with that gesture, withdrawing all claims on her father's heart.

The other kind of love Arceo seems concerned about is mother's love. Among the more important of her stories on this theme are "Ang Nanay ni Iking" (1944, later reprinted as "Ang Kanyang Ina" in 1946), "Ina" (1947), "Ito ang Buhay" (1946), and "Hindi Lumulubog ang Araw" (1946). Of these, the last is most outstanding. What is interesting is that at about this time in her life, Arceo was about to be a mother herself, and this may have been the reason for this preoccupation with the theme.

In the story, Pacing is wide awake, unable to sleep while her husband Pidiong blissfully snores away. She has just seen her daughter off to a party with a date, and the sense of impending loss of her daughter sets her emotions churning. Slowly, Arceo hints at memories of the past, and we begin to understand Pacing's feelings. She herself eloped with Pidiong sixteen years earlier, and is now beginning to have an idea of the hurt she must have inflicted on her mother. When Pidiong rises from sleep and lovingly reminds her that she still has "Paking, Charing, Nita, at Totoy," we understand her reply: "Iba si Cita . . ." Cita is her firstborn, the fruit of the impulsiveness of her youth. Arceo the new-mother-to-be understands what she's writing about.

But Arceo doesn't limit the theme to the noble and devoted mother. She swings to the other extreme sometimes and writes of mothers who harbor opposite feelings toward their offspring. Belen in "Ito Ang Buhay" (1946) squeezes her legs together at the moment of delivery and succeeds in killing her baby:

Inimpit niya ang pagsilang ng sanggol. Pawisang-pawisan siya. Namumutla siya at halos ay nawalan siya ng ulirat nang pasilang ang sanggol. At tinipis ni Belen ang kanyang paa. (*Ang Mutya*, 1 October 1946, 6)

In "Pasko ng Kanyang Puso" (1950), Meni, abandoned by her husband Arturo, is at the point of despair and about to strangle the younger of her two children who is a mere baby. The baby is saved only because Arturo arrives and is reconciled with his family.

### The Strength of Women

The motivations of these women, Belen and Meni, the revelation of their consciousness, brings us to the second most frequent theme in this decade of Arceo's fiction. Meni and Belen are just two of the many strong-hearted women of Liwayway A. Arceo. They may be wrong, they may do things for the wrong reason or wrong things for the right reason, but they are always creatures of steel. They may be suffering wives, liberated career girls, or the proverbial whores with hearts of gold, but always, always, they are strong women. In "Sa Hirap Man o Ginhawa" (1950), the long-suffering Matilde, who is wife to Ipe, the proverbial ardent-suitor-turned-drunkard-and-wife-beating-husband, displays courage of an unusual kind. The story opens with Matilde's realization of her state. The decision to leave Ipe forms in her mind. But slowly, she comes to a reversal of her decision, especially after she sees her two children sleeping, unaware of her decision, and after Ipe wakes from his drunken stupor and apologizes profusely, promising to do better. She doesn't cry in relief or beg him to change but merely asks, in a calm manner, that he better himself. There is strength there, both in her decision to give him another chance, and the unspoken condition of her staying. Here is a woman calculating her chances for happiness, and boldly opting for still another crack at it.

By the late forties, the women in Arceo's stories also tended to be like her: married, career oriented and, most telling of all, married to artists. "Sining Din Ang Buhay" (1947) is almost autobiographical. Along with "Maganda Ang Ninang Ko" (1946), it was among A. G. Abadilla's choices of outstanding stories of 1947 (Abadilla 1948).

The story features a married couple, Geling and Marcial. They talk about their friends Net and Georgie, and it soon becomes obvious that Net and Georgie are separated. It is hinted that intelligence, or the lack of it, on the part of the woman, had much to do with the separation. It soon becomes apparent too, that Geling is different from Net when she tells her husband,

Kung ang napangasawa mo e gaga, walang babati sa iyo. Maniniwala sa lahat ng sabi mo. Ngunit sa kasawiang palad, kahit utak lamok, mayroon ang asawa mo. Marunong umamoy kung may tao, at kung mayron, mangangagat. (*Daigdig*, 10 April 1947, 20)

Marcial is, of course, amused by this saucy retort and, in the end, has to admit: "Kung gaga ang pinakasalan ko, hindi ako maligaya ngayon."

"Bughaw Ang Langit Bukas" (1950) is not one of Arceo's best stories, principally because the story ends in uncontrolled sentimentalism but, again, it features a woman of strength and independence. When we first view Amor, she has left her philandering husband and returned to work—something her husband forbade. She is slowly adjusting herself to her new status. Soon she is busy preparing for marriage to Mamerto, a man she met shortly after separating from Delfin. In the midst of her preparations, the doorbell rings, and Delfin, weak from illness, is at the door. The story ends with Amor telling Delfin they'll see a doctor, for Delfin's medication. Here is a woman who wills to leave her husband and then just as stoutly wills to take him back, despite a waiting lover and despite being "liberated."

"Panibugho" (1948) has, again, a married couple. The story is a technically sophisticated one. It opens with Greg telling Loleng that he is being pursued by his first sweetheart. There is an intimation that he is not entirely averse to this, making Loleng sick with jealousy. Then there is a shift in point of view. The reader realizes that it is not the actual story. It is only the unfinished story of a writer being read by his wife. The husband is testing her reaction. However, instead of eliciting jealous or hurt remarks, she responds: "Aba, e di nakita mo kung paano pala kadaling pumatay ng tao!" The husband is stunned. "Hindi ganyan ang ibig kong mangyari, e. Ang babae, kailangang magtiis ng ano mang pasakit ng asawa." To which Matilde replies with a tart: "Akala mo!" And she turns her back on the now smiling husband. There is light banter there, but there is also a woman standing up for herself. She won't be anybody's doormat, and will definitely not merely stand by while her husband runs around.

Concurrent with this strength that the female characters display, there is an opposite palpable weakness in the character of the male protagonists in Arceo's stories. To begin with, the number of stories that feature men as central characters is negligible. And in the few that are built around male protagonists, they are not shown in a favorable light. They are drunkards, poor providers, and generally unfaithful. If they are not drunkards, they are men who turn to drink at the slightest sign of defeat or suffering. Victor in "Sangandaan"



(1945) is drowning in whisky while castigating the absent Delia for proving inconstant. Pending in "Maliit Ang Daigdig" (1947 and later reprinted as "Laging May Isa Pang Pag-ibig" in 1950) can only stand by mutely when his wife angrily confronts him with the fact that his woman is pregnant and has come to her house to beg her to take care of her and her child when she gives birth. At the end, he is merely informed by a telegram from a government agency, sent to him as the designated closest relative of his woman. He is not even the first to read it, a fact that stresses his irresponsible noninvolvement and inaction.

### The Artist as Hero

The third pervading theme in Arceo's stories of this decade is the artist as hero or protagonist. True to her tendency to cull subject matter from personal experience, the artist in her stories almost always is a poet (especially the men) or a writer. Even her women are almost always writers like herself. The Nadya stories ("Nawawala si Nadya" [1946], "Malayo Man si Nadya" [1946], "Nagbalik si Nadya" [1946], "Naulila si Nadya" [1947], "Naghahanap si Nadya" [1949] and "Nakalimot si Nadya" [1949]) are stories of a cat named Nadya and a female character who is first seen as a young girl and then later as a writer.

Most of these stories that feature artists as heroes were written after 1945, when the author had met and married Manuel Principe, the Tagalog poet. Some of the artist heroes even have names that start with the letter "M," or nicknames like Noli or Noel, which are obvious take-offs from the name "Manuel." In most of the stories also, the common attitudes toward artists are repeatedly articulated. The mother of Tiya Nena in "Tiya Nena" (1945) refuses to have her daughter marry Luis Garcia, a poet, because "ang makata ay hindi makaliligaya." In "Mula sa Kabila ng Daigdig" (1946), which is told from the point of view of a dead woman, the hero is a dreamy artist who soon turns true to his so-called bohemian instincts and neglects his wife and two children. Arceo ends the story with the wife's taking a calesa with her children and its being hit headlong by an onrushing truck. In "Marupok" (1949), the persona, a young girl again, talks about Marte, her *kinakapatid* who is a popular local poet much in demand for "putungan at balagtasan." Marte meets and falls for the wiles of Lulu, one of the fiesta queens to whom he addresses his poems. Being married, he solves his dilemma by com-

mitting suicide with Lulu. He is, as the title suggests, *marupok*. It is suggested that his being an artist makes this a matter of course. An artist is bohemian, an artist is fickle, an artist is a lover of one woman to too many.

The artist's psyche is the concern of "Muling Pagkabuhay" (1946). The entire story is a monologue by a painter. It starts with the persona telling the reader of a woman's death. Then he reveals that he was once married to Nelia, whom he claims he loved. She bore him a child and they were happy for a while. But Nelia could not understand him. She could not understand his need for solitude, or the fact that he must so protect his hands that he could not do such simple household tasks as chopping firewood and fetching water. He relates that he soon grew emotionally apart from her, while at the same time gaining attention for his artistry. Then we realize that the dead girl he talks of at the beginning of the story is not Nelia but Cita, a girl he later met who understood him and whom he lived with when he left Nelia. Now, he tells the reader, Cita is dead, and he is going back to Nelia. After all, it is Nelia he loves, though it was Cita who understood him. He never hurt Nelia, he insists. He truly loved and still loves her!

There is cleverness of presentation here, and the expert unfolding of complex character. It is among the shorter stories of the author (the average Arceo story runs only to about five pages), and yet she is able to present, in so few words, the psyche of an artist. He has his own set of values, his own idea of fidelity, his own explanations of things. They may sound odd to the reader, but he is sincere in believing them, and soon has the reader believing along with him.

### **The Child As Innocent Observer and Witness**

Finally, the fourth prevalent theme in Arceo's short stories of this decade is that of the child as the innocent observer of and witness to the actions of adults. Even the most casual reading of the stories shows that Arceo has a penchant for using the child as the ordering sensibility in bringing out a story. Impact is created by the clash between the way the child perceives events and what the reader sees as actually going on. "Umiiyak ang Ninang Ko" (1943) and "Maganda ang Ninang Ko" (1946) are good examples of this. But the best example is the second prize winning "Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa" (1943).

Apart from the fact that "Uhaw . . ." is most closely identified with the author and is considered her signature story, the story outlines the others in texture and artistry. Although it was written when she was barely seventeen years old and published when she was only nineteen, the work displays great maturity and restraint and remarkable control of material.

"Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa" uses the child-narrator as a witness to the foibles and pains of adults. It is made up of paragraphs separated by numbers in chronological order. It has no dialogue, and is therefore nonrepresentative of Arceo's short stories of this time in this aspect. It contains only observations, selected impressions, plus excerpts of a letter jotted down as entries in a young girl's diary, records of the day-to-day events in her life. It begins with number 1 and ends with number 25. We don't learn much from the first entry, only that another person has been sharing the bed of the persona for several nights now, someone who sighs through the night. Our only clue to the identity of this someone is the persona's writing that she sleeps with her head on this person's chest and can hear the beating of the person's heart. We then conclude that it is someone close to the persona.

The next several entries, however, reveal the identity of this someone as the persona's mother, as well as the underlying tension and conflict of the story. The girl confides in the pages of her diary her observations about the general quietness of the marriage of her parents and in her innocence provides the answer:

Marahil ay sapagkat kapwa sila may malawak na kaunawaan:  
ang pagbibigayan sa isa't isa ay hindi nila malimot kailan man.  
(Arceo 1968, 2)

This initial self-explanation of things around her is the intimation to the reader that something is wrong, that there is more to the politeness between her parents, a politeness which goes with the sadness in her mother's face: her smiles are now as rare as rain in summer.

This explanation, demanded by the need to feel secure, soon slowly crumbles. The next entries reveal the fact that her parents have nearly stopped talking to each other and have reduced their conversation to such necessary matters as the payment of light and water bills, and the fact that they have stopped operating as a family. They never go out anymore, and when she does go out with her mother, it is always without her father. As the entries continue,

we become witness to the destruction of a marriage, innocently recorded by a young girl in her own terms. There is mention of the father's long nights out and her mother's secret weeping. There is mention of a diary found years earlier in her father's jacket. She wonders what could possibly be in the diary. But when the impressions are put together, we are provided with a complete picture. The diary contains the secrets of her father's heart, the discovery of which has made all the difference.

In entries twelve to nineteen, we have the highest point of the story which is, at the same time, the point of realization for the girl. The whimsical tenor of the early paragraphs is replaced from this point on by a straightforward tone. In this sense we have "Uhaw . . ." as a story of initiation. We have innocence defiled, innocence violently forced to adult maturity. It is a child's growing up into the world of adults where things are not always what one wishes them to be, where one can get hurt, where one begins to feel. When she finds the picture and the letters of the other woman, she views her father, first with contempt, and then later with understanding. In between she becomes her father's unwilling confidante. He tells her:

Huwag kang palililang sa simbuyo ng iyong kalooban; ang unang tibok ng puso ay hindi pag-ibig sa tuwina . . . Halos kasinggulang mo ako nang pagtaliin ang mga puso namin ng iyong Ina . . . Mura pang lubha ang labingwalong taon . . . Huwag ikaw ang magbigay sa iyong sarili ng mga kalungkutang magpapahirap sa iyo habang-buhay. (Arceo 1968, 6)

In this way, he thrusts upon her shoulders the burden of understanding, while at the same time forcing her to be worldly-wise. The father also reveals the cause of his earlier statement: "Nasa kalamigan ng lupa ang kaluwalhatian ko!" He regrets his youthful marriage which now causes him great anguish and a dilemma which makes him wish for death.

The final two entries depict a heart-breaking scene. Her father is dying, and his delirious state makes him believe that it is his mistress before him, holding his hand, not his wife. The wife, loving him to the end, pretends she is the woman. She tells him the words he has long wished to hear, kisses him, and he dies in a state of happiness.

In this last part of the story we see Arceo exercise remarkable restraint and control. There is an almost clinical rendering as the girl

records her father's death and her mother's ultimate show of devotion. In this restraint we see also the coming of age of a young girl, her shedding of the last vestiges of innocence—and more. We see the restraint echoing the absence of emotional release in the girl as well as in the husband and wife. They are individuals whose emotional existence is denied. They are emotionally unfulfilled. The father, through no fault of his nor of his wife, has fallen out of love with her and now loves another woman passionately. There is no way out of his predicament short of separation from his wife. But this he does not do. In this way he is a prisoner. The mother loves the father, but is not loved in return. The other woman denies her own feelings and those of the girl's father by deciding to give him up in order not to break up a home. The girl herself is denied love and a happy home. They are all victims of love denied. They all thirst for love—as, the title implies, parched earth thirsts for rain. All are in an emotional desert and the father's delirious delusion in death only cruelly underlines this.

### The Short Story Techniques

The discussion of the themes most used by Liwayway A. Arceo necessarily leads to some of the literary techniques she employs in presenting and bringing out these themes. These techniques are myriad but the techniques most expertly employed by Arceo and the most typical are the use of dialogue for shaping characters and for delineating details of a story such as setting and time; the manipulation of language; the clever use of point of view; and the use of typographical devices such as parentheses, italics, bold type, and even numbers.

#### Dialogue

The first noticeable feature in all the stories is *dialogue*. We immediately see that it is Arceo's favorite tool. Perhaps this is because it is the fastest and easiest way to unfold a story. But more remarkable than her use of dialogue to facilitate action and presentation is her use of dialogue to reveal character. There are no unnatural responses, no awkwardness in manner. The dialogue flows naturally in all her stories. It is all *makabuhay*.

By the time "Babae" appeared in 1948, Arceo was so expert that she could write an entire story using only dialogue and make the character and subject matter, as well as setting, dress, time, and dramatic business clear. The story approaches the qualities of drama and is reminiscent of Hemingway's "The Killers." Like Hemingway's story, it is completely devoid of expository material or descriptive parts. But while the Hemingway story still has introductory clauses preceding a character's speech, and even description of business, "Babae" merely has one speech followed by another, without any qualifying clauses.

There are two women involved, both *kumare* and next-door neighbors. One spots the other and invites her in for *merienda* and soon both are engaged in conversation ranging from the current "New Look" (one is lengthening her dresses while talking) to the latest juicy bit about the richest woman in town and how she is about to shed her fifth man for another one waiting in the wings. Through it all, the dialogue is natural and fluid. The women's personalities, interests, and small-mindedness are brought out, plus the life story of the woman whom everybody in the town calls "Marquesa," who seems to be of European nobility. The story ends with the reader left in suspense as to who the sixth man is. But that is not important. What is important is the way the story is told. What is important is the revelation of two women.

Looking back now, we see that "Babae" is the earliest harbinger of Arceo's deep involvement with radio and, subsequently, television. She shows in the story a natural talent for dialogue, and drama is the inevitable venue for this talent. Her sense of timing, her perception of the nuances of speech, and the fluidity of her dialogue sequences are perfect.

### Language Manipulation

The second technique used by Arceo is the effective manipulation of language. When one reads her stories of this decade one perceives the meticulous use of the Tagalog language and the fact that the author is totally at home with it. There is no feeling that the lines are first thought out in English and then translated into Tagalog, as was Teodoro A. Agoncillo's main complaint about some writers of the forties (Agoncillo et al. 1967, 36).

A passage at the beginning of "Ang Lihim ng Kalupi" (1948), in which we have a mother and child scene, is written thus:

Buwisit na bata ito! . . . At niyugyug niya ang sanggol na ang pag-inggit ay nauwi sa totohanang pag-iyak. Lalong naulol ang pagkayamot ni Ines sa tila paghamong yaon sa katatagan ng kanyang pagkamapagbigay. Muli niyang sinigawan ang walang malay na sanggol at ito'y napatili at lalong nag-ihit. (*Kislap Magazine*, 28 September 1948, 16)

In this passage we see the preciseness of the manner in which Arceo describes a baby's cries by using four words to denote the gradations of the intensity of its cries. The baby does not merely "iyak." First we have "pag-inggit," then "pag-iyak," as the mother angrily shakes him, then we have "napatili" and then "nag-ihit" as the mother shouts at him. This is only one instance where we have Arceo exploiting the possibilities of the Tagalog language.

Another instance of language manipulation is the constant repetition of phrases or entire sentences to approximate or reveal the state of mind and emotion of the characters. In "Maraming Kulay ang Pag-ibig" (1946), we have the repetition of the following phrase about half a dozen times in this very short story:

. . . sa malusog na dibdib ni Marta, sa makipot na bibig ni Marta, sa mahaba at maitim na buhok ni Marta. (*Daigdig*, 30 November 1946, 9)

This repetition is analogous to the urges of temptation in Bindoy, the male protagonist. He is married to Salud and meets the girl Marta in the corner *tindahan* where she is a *tindera*. Marta is all that the repeated phrase says she is, and more. She wants Bindoy, and in fact gives herself to him one afternoon in a room behind the store. The dilemma that Bindoy suffers, the *udyok* and *simbuyo* of temptation that beset him, the emotional turmoil that Marta causes in him are all there in the constant repetition of the phrase.

In "Sangandaan" (1950), which I have chosen as most representative of the ninety-nine stories, the constant repetition in Talya's mind of her friend Nena's jealousy and the reasons behind it serve not only to reveal the state of Talya's mind but also serve as foreshadowing. When we read the constant interjections concerning Nena, we know that Talya's husband will ultimately prove no different from Nena's husband.

Typically Arceo, the story features a domestic drama. David has just come home after a three-year assignment in a faraway place. In those three years Talya and he merely exchanged letters. Talya is filled with joy as she watches him sleeping and notices two things: David's new moustache and his obvious health. It is as if somebody had been taking good care of him.

But no, she is not jealous like her friend Nena. She trusts David. But all throughout, even while she takes merienda with her son, her conversation with Nena about Telmo's infidelity occupies her thoughts. Even when she decides to unpack a box of books which David had expressly told her not to unpack—since they are not really valuable books—Talya's thoughts are on Nena.

When Talya opens the box anyway and finds the fateful picture of a woman and a child between the covers of the last book at the bottom of the box, we know that her discovery is inevitable. The repetition of Nena's story, like a musical counterpoint, prepares and clues in the reader for the eventual conclusion.

### Point of View

The third technique that Arceo uses well is the use of point of view in order to bring out a story, provide complexity in presentation, and at the same time inject freshness to what may be considered as trite subject matter.

Arceo uses point of view to escape the chronological manner of unfolding a story. Arceo's stories in this decade are elliptical in nature, never going by the straight and narrow path of chronological narration. In "Muling Pagkabuhay" (1946) for instance, the use of the painter's point of view helps in presenting the story in a manner that is complex and sophisticated while at the same time saving the reader from long and arduous exposition.

This same technique allows for greater impact and greater realism through more direct character revelation. The painter in "Muling Pagkabuhay" for instance, by speaking for himself, provides directness as well as psychological realism. He speaks in his language, explains his reasons and motivations as only he can, and the result is greater credibility.

Arceo is especially effective when she employs the first person point of view. In fact, most of the ninety-nine stories are written in the first person. As a result, in the stories where the leading charac-



ters are female, the reader easily feels that the characters are extensions of the author. Very few of her stories employ the omniscient point of view and the few that do employ it do not have the same impact as the other stories.

Her most successful stories seem to be the ones with her persona talking—from the little girls to the young married women. She seems to resort to the first person point of view when writing of subject matter close to her heart or intimately known to her. Thus, stories about young girls' childhood and innocence, as well as stories of young women in love or newly married, are told from this point of view, while stories which feature people of the lower class or the so-called dregs of society like prostitutes or the like are usually written from the third person or omniscient point of view. There seems to be a correlation—at least in these stories—between her distance from a subject matter and the distance she puts between herself and her mouthpiece.

Special mention should be made of the use of the child's point of view in Arceo's stories of this time. These stories especially reveal Arceo's ability to use a point of view in order to provide freshness to "old" subject matter. In "Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa," for instance, the telling of the story from the child's point of view is crucial to the quality of the story. The use of the child's sensibility not only provides freshness to the subject matter which, after all, is one of the oldest and most trite topics possible, but also enables the story to escape from possible sentimentalism. The subject of "Uhaw . . ." is a delicate matter which can easily lead to emotional excess if not handled properly, but Arceo's use of the child's sensibility—instead of the father's, or the mother's, or even that of the other woman—provides the necessary balance. The result is great restraint and superb control of material.

The same can also be said of "Umiiyak ang Ninang Ko." The girl's innocent chatter and innocent way of looking at events provide a certain detachment which precludes sentimentalism. Imagine if the story were told from the point of view of the unfortunate Badong!

Sentimentalism is not the only thing avoided by the manipulation of point of view in these stories. There is also greater impact due to the difference between the way a child sees things and events from his own perspective and the way things and events are understood by the reader. When the girl in "Umiiyak ang Ninang Ko" asks Badong if he is also getting married, the irony of the situation is underscored.

### Typographical Techniques

The fourth technique comes in the guise of such typographical manifestations as parentheses, italics, boldface and, even, numbers. Here again, we have a young writer employing all possible techniques in order to better present a story.

Parentheses often represent interjecting thoughts that run in a character's mind in Arceo's stories of this period. In "Sangandaan" (1945) we have an example of this. Talya's interjecting thoughts are set in parentheses to set these off from the rest of the text. They are asides as it were, or commentaries, which also provide background material and information regarding the characters. Sometimes, parentheses serve to provide information in an oblique manner, on the action of a character. In "Bagong Magdalena" (1949) we have one such instance:

Tulad niyon ang nangyayari sa mga kuwento. (Bakit nga hindi nang-ingiti si Matilde?) Lumapit sa kanya si Alfredo pagkatapos niyang awitin ang . . . iyon nga, ang hinuhuni niya ngayon:

When your hair has turned to silver,  
I will love you just the same,  
I will always call you sweetheart.  
(*Liwayway*, 5 September 1949, 8)

The passage is a bit of flashback providing the background for the story, and the parenthetical interjection serves to inform the reader of the character's present action.

The use of italics and boldface or other fonts different from the font she uses for the story proper are also typical Arceo devices in this period. We see this, for instance, in "Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa." The different fonts are representations of speeches or dialogue of the girls' mother and father—as well as excerpts of the letters of the other woman—as they are recorded by the young girl in her diary. The shifts in font serve to alert the reader of the changes in point of view and tell us which parts are from the girl's viewpoint and therefore colored by her sensibility. We thus see things in proper perspective and form our own understanding of the situation in the story. The result is tension and magnificent texture.

Sometimes, a change in font denotes narrative structure. For instance, in "Panibugho" (1948), the change in font in the second part

of the story where we have a couple disagreeing on the proper attitude of a wife toward a husband's infidelity tells the (by now almost disoriented) reader that the second part is the actual story and the first part is merely the unfinished short story of the writer-husband. "Panibugho" is a story within a story, in effect.

The numbers in the prize-winning "Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa" constitute one instance of Arceo's use of numbers in some of the ninety-nine stories. Teodoro A. Agoncillo (1949, 231) claims that there is no need for them in the story and that "Uhaw . . ." can well be told without them:

Ang kuwento ay pinaghiwa-hiwalay sa pamamagitan ng mgaandang bilang. Datapwat ito'y hindi kailangan, sapagkat alisin man ay hindi magbabago o masisira ang kabuuan at kaisahan ng akda. Angandang bilang ay dapat lamang gamitin kung ang bawa't bahagi ng kuwentong tinatandaan ng bilang ay hiwalay at naiiba sa sinusundan o sumusunod na bilang.

Perhaps. But then perhaps not. The numbers are the only clue we have that the paragraphs are entries in a young girl's diary. That they stand for time sequences or for lapses in time. Without them, the story would need to be told in a straightforward manner and would not have the same freshness of presentation or the effectivity of the diary form. It would be an entirely different story altogether, no different perhaps from the usual tearjerkers, because it is really the stuff of which sentimental stories are made. With her use of the numbers however, we see the movement of time from the first entry to the last and bear witness to the slow disintegration of a young girl's innocence and her initiation into the painful realities of life.

## Conclusion

Liwayway A. Arceo is a modernist. She is the product of new influences on Tagalog Literature, notably from the West. She still makes use of the "old" themes—most especially the tried and true theme of Love—but her treatment of these "old" themes gives them freshness and new life. Her characters are not flat. They are invested with individuating characteristics that make them believable people. Her stories are usually presented in the nonchronological manner with a directness that comes most especially from the use of dialogue and point of view.

Liwayway A. Arceo's stories at this time are characterized by a marked contemporaneity in language. While it is true that she takes pains to exploit and remain faithful to her chosen medium of expression, the Tagalog language, the fact that the Tagalog she uses is not the cumbersome "old" Tagalog cannot escape even the most casual reader. All her stories of this decade are told in the Tagalog of the forties, not the Tagalog of Balagtas or the traditional writers. Here is colloquial Tagalog, but Tagalog just the same. This, plus the directness of her stories made possible through the techniques she applies in them, make the stories highly readable. One doesn't have to consult a Tagalog dictionary all the time.

Moreover, in Arceo, the Tagalog is in proper syntax (always, the predicate precedes the subject in her sentences) and although there is already the appearance in her stories of English words which had by then seeped into the language, there is great care in limiting the use of these words. In "Sangandaan" for example, the use of the English word "cover" is a perfect example of her resorting to an English word that has become almost part of everyday Tagalog. Most of the time, these words are used to make dialogue appropriate to a character, as for instance in the speeches of "educated" female characters, and no more than that. Furthermore, words like "inobserbahan" and "inatake" which are really English words given Tagalog conjugations are avoided in straight descriptions or expositions. "Katulad" is used, not "pareho." "Nagulat" is used, not "naspresya." In other words, English words are resorted to when necessary, but other than these times authentic Tagalog is used, not English words given Tagalog forms.

The strain of didacticism traditional in Tagalog Literature is not apparent in these ninety-nine stories. There is no obvious attempt to teach a moral lesson, nor even to hint at one in these stories. If a lesson can be taken from any of these stories, it is incidental and not the purpose of the story.

Liwayway A. Arceo is also a very personal writer and, for this reason, not particularly socially conscious. There is a great preoccupation with characters' personalities and motivations, emotional states and psyches. The accent is on the characters and their relationship with one another (specifically, the central character to the beloved) or to those immediately around him (the central character and the members of his family), not the central character in relation to society. There is no escaping a personal level of relating to a higher level of involvement with society. The Arceo world is a world limited to

the individual. And only the loved one or loved ones are admitted into that limited world. All the rest of society is vaguely definable.

Liwayway A. Arceo is not a political writer. There is nothing political in these stories. There are no raised fists or any kind of hero defiant of society. This is perhaps because of the times during which these stories were written. Half of this decade saw the Philippines occupied by Japan when censorship made most writers write solely on nonsubversive or innocuous subject matter like love and fidelity in marriage. The second half of the decade had the country recovering from the ravages of war and therefore concerns were basically those of survival. At the same time, there was exhilaration at having survived a long war, and the emphasis was on the fact that life must go on.

Perhaps also, and more to the point, the reason for this absence of political consciousness in Arceo at this time is Liwayway A. Arceo herself. She was young, fresh out of her teens, and equipped with a typical young woman's outlook on life. Political consciousness was simply out of the periphery of her sensibility. Her concerns were more personal, more of the heart and hearth. Love, the innocence of children, artists as heroes—these were more real to her than anything political.

There is, however, a particular kind of awareness in these stories. It is the awareness of women of themselves as individuals, as reflected in the strong heroines of most of the stories. In this sense Liwayway A. Arceo was a feminist long before the word became fashionable. She wrote of women who worked, women who took care of their families when their husbands left them—or when they left their husbands—and women who stayed married not because of security but always—and only—out of love.

Liwayway A. Arceo at this time is also basically a writer of the middle class. Her themes revolve around middle class concerns such as love, career, ambition and, most especially, the solidarity of the family. The typical Arceo story of this period centers on a domestic conflict among obviously middle class characters. The ultra rich are not represented here. On the other hand, her stories of the very poor are very few and often unsuccessful mainly because they are characterized by a certain sense of artificiality. She is at her best when she writes of middle class people and their motivations, preoccupations, joys and sorrows.

There is nothing cerebral in these stories. They are not intellectual excursions into human experience. They are made to appeal to the emotions, although, it must be stressed, there is no crass attempt to sentimentalize in the majority of the stories. The attempt seems to be to make the stories easy to read and understand, and therefore the emphasis is on clarity. The dialogue, the directness of approach, the unity of impression, are all used with clarity in mind. "Hindi maligoy," was the common comment on the writings of the author as revealed by a survey *Liwayway* magazine ran on readers' preferred authors.

If Liwayway A. Arceo's stories can be faulted for anything at this stage of her writing career, it is for the seeming avoidance of exposition and expository description. In her adeptness at manipulating the dialogue so that it is able to move the story's action, she takes her attention away from the possibilities of straight description. There is, therefore, a distinct lack of ambiance in these stories, a lack of atmosphere. This may be because, as stated earlier, Liwayway A. Arceo is a very personal writer. Her stories are inward-turning delineations of human emotions rather than depictions of human beings as part of a whole universe. Consequently, there is a distinct lack of spatial dimension in these stories which leads to a lack of ambiance and atmosphere, with the exception of a very few. The stories can be moved to another time and another place and still be valid expressions of human experience. The characters may be particularized, but the setting, the conflicts, the situations are universal. The details of the surroundings are indefinite. It is as if the characters were living in a vacuum.

Concurrent with this avoidance of straight descriptive passages that would flesh out setting and mood is the minimal use of metaphorical and imagistic devices. When Arceo does use images and metaphors in these stories, they are limited to the standard "rosas," "buwan," "talulot ng rosas," and "makikislap na bituin." There is no great attempt at using fresh images or indulging in more than a bit of lyricism.

Since the forties the author has continued to write short and long fiction, as well as screenplays. These ninety-nine stories are only forerunners of hundreds more, and future research will tell us whether she deviates from her forties' style and expands her vision and becomes better through the decades.

## Notes

1. "Banyaga" was translated into English as "Stranger" by Mabini Rey Centeno and published in the *Philippines Free Press*, 22 December 1962. It has also been translated into Russian and published in *Peasant* in 1967.

2. This was gleaned from an interview with the author. She was in charge of collating data from the survey and was therefore aware of readers' response to her writing.

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