

The Waig Protocol: Ecological Trial, Somatic Belonging, and the Withheld Verdict in Manuel E. Arguilla's *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife*

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Abstract

How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife by Manuel E. Arguilla is an uncomplicated story about rural-urban reconciliation; this paper presents a counter-reading through the lens of the ecological trial, a rite of passage instituted under patriarchy and shaped by the environment. Through a qualitative hermeneutic-thematic reading of 28 excerpts, the authors focus on the social belonging of a future daughter-in-law, evaluated not through dialogue but through the person's somatic positioning in relation to the agrarian sensorium. The analysis identifies five themes: the diverted route across the Waig riverbed as a counter-infrastructure; bull Labang as a non-human expert; physical sensory information over verbal interrogation; structural paralipsis through a child focalizer; and withheld verdict. The research shows how the common pedagogical headnotes obstruct the narrative structure.

Keywords: Philippine literature in English, postcolonial ecocriticism, Manuel E. Arguilla, literary animal studies, spatial theory, focalization

1. Introduction

How My Brother Leon Brings His Wife Home was awarded first place in the Commonwealth Literary Competitions in 1940 and is named after Arguilla's collection of short stories. This short work, which can be read in twenty minutes and discussed for an hour, has been a pillar of the Philippine educational system for over seventy years and continues to be used in studies that examine the process of cultural adaptation. The story focuses on a girl from the city who is accepted by a family from the province; a husband and wife overcome class prejudice; and

a father accepts his son's wife. It is easy to believe that each of the points made above is valid. In this case, however, what has been done is a limited interpretation of the text that takes the ending of the story for its theme and its outlook for the idea presented in the text.

The essence of what is described as the story is less an experience than a process. Someone has devised it; one path has exchanged places with another, one beast of burden for another, one type of cart for another one. A girl has sent the child and given him directives he does not argue with. The female character has been sent to her

husband via the system of measuring, where the criteria are never given to her, to her spouse, and, of course, to the writer and the reader. Finally, a conclusion has been made yet has never been disclosed anywhere; instead, it is to be derived from the phrase about the watering of the bull. To say that this story is about acceptance is as appropriate as saying that this is a story about a verdict in a court.

This article argues that the method used is ecological. Nagrebcan's father does not test Maria by questioning her, her family, or her housekeeping. Instead, he drives her through the dried riverbed at night with a working animal and asks his younger son two questions: whether she was frightened by a bull, or what happened on the journey. The instruments of judgment are a bull, a river, a night, a smell, a star, and a song. The evidence is bodily: whether a hand was placed on the forehead, whether the voice hit the stone and started again, and whether there was laughter accompanying the word "home."

The researchers refer to this arrangement as the ecological experiment and present it as a movable analytic idea with three clear elements: a planned route through an environment where human intervention is obscured; a foreign judge — the being who reacts and gives evidence; and a somatic way to know things where natural reflexes are interpreted rather than spoken words. This idea applies not only to Arguilla but also to similar concepts found in agrarian literature from the Global South.

Three research questions organize the study:

- 1) How is space produced, differentiated, and instrumentalized in the text, and what social relations does that production encode?
- 2) What functions does the non-human—principally the bull Labang, but also the riverbed, the darkness, the odors, and the star—perform in the adjudication of Maria's belonging?
- 3) How does the narrative situation, and specifically the restricted knowledge of a child focalizer, structure the reader's access to the trial and its verdict?

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Arguilla Criticism and the Pastoral Frame

The most significant critical evaluation of Arguilla is Galdon's (1975) interpretation of the Nagrebcan stories as Philippine pastoral.

Galdon's approach defines a purposeful experimentation in combining English narration with the cadence of rural dialects, and places the literature in the tradition tracing back from Theocritus through Spenser. Galdon's framework is precise, giving proper recognition to the linguistic strata used by Arguilla. It establishes a new typology for literary critics, which this paper tries to overcome. Pastoral criticism views landscapes as a setting for the art of human meaning-making, and praises it for its idealization, nostalgia, and asceticism. Therefore, once the Nagrebcan stories are classified as pastoral, *Waig* becomes an atmosphere, and *Labang* is considered local color rather than an agent.

The linguistic part of scholarship in the Philippines has largely made use of the way of carrying out the study, as has been demonstrated in the analysis that has shown that the strategies that are well demonstrated by Arguilla in the face of Ilocano culture are the use of unexplained words and glossing—*carretela*, *camino real*, *calesa*, *Manong*, *Manang*, *dangla*, *arraais*, *sinta*. Neil & Garcia (2024) suggest that Philippine literature has internal features connected with translation and may not be defined by particular cultural perceptions characteristic of monocultural realism. Laurel (2012) asserts that Arguilla and Bulosan are important figures in the emergence of Philippine proletarian literature, which appeared after national language politics were established. Servaña (2026) mentions counter-colonialism as the approach applied in the analysis of Philippine literature written in English.

The present work has not examined Arguilla through an ecological lens. In Nagrebcan, the environment serves as part of an authenticity claim rather than participating in the social dynamics. Gifford's (1999) distinction between pastoral, anti-pastoral, and post-pastoral is useful: in Galdon's version, Arguilla is pastoral, while the interpretation presented here reads the story as post-pastoral, with space as a mere social mechanism.

2.2 Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Global South

Postcolonial ecocriticism developed from the acknowledgment that first-generation Anglo-American environmental criticism placed social aspects of environmentalism in a secondary position compared to preservationism, ignoring communities in postcolonial countries that suffer

disproportionate ecological risks (Iheka, 2018). DeLoughrey & Handley (2011) interpreted land in postcolonial texts as the place of the restoration of dignity instead of good; Banerjee (2016) examined possible intersections; and Huggan & Tiffin (2015) presented a key concept of the field: that the exploitation of colonized land and people is structurally connected and that the animal serves as a pivotal point of this connection. According to Rahman (2021), the distinction inherent in deep ecology between anthropocentrism and biocentrism does not apply to Southern countries with populated territories, where it is difficult to distinguish between ecology and livelihood. Southeast Asian ecocriticism has already progressed as a regional entity, and the contributions of the Philippines include the study of typhoons and climate fantasies and traditional environmental wisdom (Jhun & Dorias, 2024); FitzGerald (2020) compares this with the experience of colonized agrarian countries of the planet where the spatial turn was expressed through postcolonial discourse instead of an environmental one.

The literature exhibits two significant gaps. First, it has primarily emphasized contemporary and late-twentieth-century literature and thus almost completely neglected the American colonial period in Philippine literature, when Arguilla wrote. Second, and more importantly from a theoretical standpoint, postcolonial ecocriticism is highly developed in terms of environmental violence and dispossession, but less developed with regard to environments as means of social reproduction.

2.3 *Space, Animals, and the Sensorium*

The analytical lexicon is drawn from three additional sources. Lefebvre (1974) defines space as a process that takes place through spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces, thus implying that literary spaces replicate the workings of spatial production instead of just describing it (Aseguinolaza, 2011; Juvan, 2015); Soja (1997); Tally Jr. (2012) take it to a general spatiality of narrative. The importance of this is apparent: a narrative that includes a plot in which something produces a dilemma of choosing between two paths embodies the production of space.

Studies of animals in literature are another ingredient in this vocabulary. McHugh (2009) shifted the focus from animals' place in literary texts to their actions within them. It was

established that animals in literature achieve agency when their actions upset the human meaning put into them, while Robles (2016) charts the history of this meaning, and Crist (2010) and Latour (2005) present the theory behind the idea. Research in rural sociology indicates that cattle resist human affairs and impact agricultural and livestock operations at various levels (Holloway et al., 2024); also, literary studies of bovine agency in Global South literature show that cattle symbolize the human ability to recognize agency in others (Eslava-Bejarano, 2023; Hostová, 2023). It is interesting that the big working bull in the barrio in the Philippines is a product of colonial ecology; the process called "*archipelagic pastoralism*," connected with processes under Spanish rule, appeared and developed only in the 19th century (Amano et al., 2021). The meaning of the *Labang* bull is not stable or unchangeable, nor can it be compared to a piece of furniture, but it is a colonial ecology used for practical purposes.

The third vocabulary is sensory. As Howes & Classen (2014) point out, the sensorium can be viewed as a field defined culturally as well as embodied, since it is subject to changes in culture and history. Esrock (2010) makes a narratological bridge by stating that the reader accesses the experience rendered through narrative not only through visual images but also through inner bodily feelings.

Olfactory research shows that smells are key to forming place attachment and social assessments unconsciously (Lindborg & Liew, 2021; Thibaud, 2011; Xiao et al., 2020), and Allen (2023) and Ingebretsen Kucirkova (2024) describe methodological approaches to research in the field of scent. From this perspective, Arguilla's story is also an olfactory narrative, as it starts and ends with the same smell.

2.4 *Narratological Framing*

Genette's (1990) differentiation between the perspective and the one who perceives, which was developed by Bal (2017) and detailed by Nieragden (2002), makes it possible to give a precise description of the narrative situation: internal fixed focalization through a homodiegetic narrator whose knowledge is limited by the structure of the narrative as opposed to being limited psychologically. The mechanism at work is paralipsis, which means refraining from giving information that the focalization would typically offer. Booth (2013)

concept of unreliability is often expected to work here but does not fit perfectly, creating issues. Baldo is not unreliable; he is just ignorant and gives a detailed account of events. The gap between what Baldo conveys and what he knows drives the story.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: The Ecological Trial

This study synthesizes the foregoing into a three-axis construct.

Axis 1: Planned itinerary (production of space). The trial determines the space where the subjects act. In Lefebvre (1974) terms, the designer is involved in the conception of space — the so-called conceived space, while the subject is in the position of the subject — the so-called representational space. The asymmetry comes into play here: the trial works precisely because the subjects cannot see the design of the space. Where colonial infrastructure overlaps with the indigenous path, substitution also gains a second-order political meaning, because taking a path is choosing a political area.

Axis 2: Non-human judgment (distributed agency). The case includes at least one non-human being whose reaction serves as relevant evidence. This is more than symbolism, because a symbol represents data the human protagonists already have, while an adjudicator provides new information. In accordance with McHugh (2009), the animal's agency comes from the fact that their actions cannot be planned beforehand.

Axis 3: The somatic epistemology (body that is put to the test). The trial measures fitness from actions of the body that are involuntary or semi-involuntary, knowing acceptance and refusal, tone of voice, ability to endure difficulties, etc., instead of taking declarations into consideration. Therefore, the issue of concealment arises: the declared test results in performance, which is not taken into account.

The notion aligns with, but is not limited to, anthropological accounts of rites of passage. van Gennep et al. (1961) and Turner (2017) outline the form of the passage: separation at the shore, liminality at the riverbed, incorporation in the room of the father. However, they do not conceptualize the passage's epistemology. What is learned, how, and under what disclosure conditions — all of this has been added by ecological trial.

3. Methodology

This investigation adopts a qualitative,

interpretivist approach involving hermeneutic close reading and reflexive thematic analysis. The epistemological view is constructionism, meaning themes are formed through the interaction between researcher and text rather than as pre-existing patterns to be discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The hermeneutical component is guided by the idea of the Gadamerian circle, which enables mutual revision of parts and the whole (Gadamer, H. G. (2004), as well as by Ricoeur's (1976) approach, demonstrating how semantic autonomy implies possible interpretations that cannot be produced by the author. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen instead of content analysis, template analysis, and grounded theory because it meets the needs outlined by Braun and Clarke: this research stresses the need for conceptual depth achieved through the analysis of one case rather than identifying patterns across the corpus.

The original text is *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife*, which first appeared in Arguilla (1940). It is now in the public domain in the Philippines because the copyright has expired fifty years after the author's death in 1944; therefore, there are no restrictions on reproduction under copyright law.

The text's complexity had an analytical impact. Many renditions of the story, floating in different forms around the Philippine classroom, critics' reviews, and online sites, start with a prefixed introductory explanation indicating that Leon was coming back home from Manila with a city-born girl whom his father would never accept until he finds her worthy, and the father invented a clever method to find out that and is waiting for the return. This prefix is just an editorial commentary with no relation to Arguilla's story; the original version starts with Maria getting out of the *carretela*, but this difference is significant in that it reveals everything that is kept in suspense by the story being analyzed: the examination itself, its author, its principle, and its prize.

The analysis followed six stages as presented by Braun & Clarke (2006). At the beginning of the process, familiarity took place, during which all material was read four times and divided into segments consisting of eleven episodes. Through systematic extraction, all segments were classified according to context. This process identified a total of 63 segments. The next thing covered was initial coding, when semantic coding and latent coding singled out 41 codes. In the next stage, the theme was generated; this step

required forming groups of codes containing not only a common subject matter, but also a common idea behind them. The review stage made it possible to abandon two themes: gender asymmetry and language problems.

Extracts are labeled E1–E28 and reproduced verbatim; ellipses are marked; all emphasis is ours.

3.1 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

The rigor of the research is compared to the requirements set by Lincoln et al. (1985), as adapted by Nowell et al. (2017), and also to those established by Tracy (2010). In terms of credibility, the study uses a long-established relationship with a short text, an active pursuit of contradictory evidence, and triangulation of analysis because all five authors coded independently and merged their codes afterward. No measure of inter-rater reliability is provided, supporting the reflexive paradigm, where unity of coding is not regarded as a criterion of quality (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Regarding dependability, this criterion is applied. In terms of transferability, the term ecological trial is defined explicitly in the research.

A team of professors and future educators from the Philippines encounters this tale as students in a classroom context. Their position has given them many advantages; however, it also has potential disadvantages, in that they are likely to notice new things in a well-known text simply because their field rewards finding something new. To avoid this trap, this study bases each conclusion on factual evidence and acknowledges the most valid criticism of our interpretation.

4. Findings

4.1 Theme 1: The Route as Instrument

The story's central action is a substitution, disclosed in stages. The reader first learns that something has been changed only when Leon reacts to it.

E1. When I sent *Labang* down the deep cut that would take us to the dry bed of the *Waig*, which could be used as a path to our place during the dry season, my brother Leon laid a hand on my shoulder and said sternly: "Who told you to drive through the fields tonight?"

Two ideas are introduced at the same time. First, the *Waig* is established as a seasonal passageway, more of a convenient water channel than an

actual road, and having been used tonight, its unusual nature is enough to surprise even a man who had been laughing for quite a while. The details of this otherwise interesting story are withheld until the end of the action: Baldo sends the bull down the length of the canal and only then senses the hand on his shoulder.

E2. "Baldo, you fool, answer me before I lay the rope of *Labang* on you. Why do you follow the *Waig* instead of the *camino real*?" His fingers bit into my shoulder. "Father, he told me to follow the *Waig* tonight, *Manong*." Swiftly, his hand fell away from my shoulder and he reached for the rope of *Labang*.

This marks the pivotal moment in the entire story, and its economic structure is astonishing. The danger is represented by the rope of *Labang* that can control the animal and is turned against the boy. The fingers dig in, and then one phrase "*Father, he told me to follow the Waig tonight, Manong*" quickly puts an end to this violent scene. Authority does not even need to be present to operate: Leon removes his hand, not because he is convinced by something, but because by calling the father he has closed a question. In this situation, the boy can make an appeal to authority himself; when authority is called upon, it is not dispelled but redistributed.

Laid out in a traditional form of "*camino real*" is not a neutral expression. Its name indicates it is a royally sanctioned road, the infrastructure of colonial historical administration. Ca Celin's *carretela* travels on the road and connects at a station point, much to Leon's satisfaction. Its counterpart is the *Waig*, nameless in Spanish and described as a riverbed rather than a road. The water only exists when it is absent. The reversion from the *Waig* to the *camino* is seen as a migration from the sphere of colonial authority to that of local authority, and this migration is made clearer by the fact that the story only takes its characters from the *camino* after the trial.

E3. "And I suppose Father also told you to hitch *Labang* to the cart and meet us with him instead of with *Castano* and the *calesa*."

In Leon's sarcasm, a second transformation may be found: the transport has been made worse. *Castano* and the *calesa*—a horse named *Castano* and a light cart—are replaced by a bull and a cart. The father has changed not one variable, but a whole group of variables. That is a design, not a coincidence. Leon understands this, although he still does not know the goal.

E4. “—you see,” my brother Leon was explaining, “the *camino real* curves around the foot of the Katayaghan hills and passes by our house. We drove through the fields because—but I’ll be asking Father as soon as we get home.”

The fragmented sentence gives the closest description in the whole story. Leon starts to explain and, in the midst of it, realizes he doesn’t know what he is explaining; the dash marks the moment he becomes aware that he is a participant in a process he’d been unaware of. The *camino real* would have brought them directly to the house; the detour had no reason whatsoever, and Leon now knows that.

E5. “Did you meet anybody on the way?” he asked. “No, Father,” I said. “Nobody passes through the Waig at night.”

The father’s first question is about *witnesses*, and Baldo’s answer, offered as ordinary local knowledge, confirms that the venue was chosen for privacy. A trial requires a closed court.

4.2 Theme 2: Labang as Non-human Examiner

Before the route is altered, before Maria is seated in the cart, she must pass a gate. An animal administers it, and Baldo administers it on the animal’s behalf.

E6. “And this is Labang of whom I have heard so much.” She held the wrist of one hand with the other and looked at Labang, and Labang never stopped chewing his cud. He swallowed and brought up to his mouth more cud, and the sound of his insides was like a drum.

Maria knows everything, including the bull’s name and significance. However, the gesture—holding one wrist with the other hand—reveals that she does not understand much and that the body responds on its own. The gesture means self-control. Labang displays indifference, and that’s the whole point; he does not act. The drum metaphor makes his interior world audible; the body becomes transparent and communicative.

E7. I laid a hand on Labang’s massive neck and said to her: “You may scratch his forehead now.” She hesitated and I saw that her eyes were on the long, curving horns. But she came and touched Labang’s forehead with her long fingers, and Labang never stopped chewing his cud except that his big eyes half closed. And by and by she was scratching his forehead very daintily.

The first result of the trial is recorded exceptionally: hesitated; the gaze was directed towards the horns; but she still appeared there

eventually, bit by bit. Four states were involved here: anticipation; the actual cause of apprehension; its influence; and calmness. The action verb in Baldo’s instruction grants the power to act to the child — an authorized intermediary and Maria as the one who begs.

The response of an animal is a strong example of nonhuman agency in McHugh’s sense. Labang didn’t do what he was supposed to do. He didn’t respond, submit, or act as he should have. He was still chewing, with only one thing changing — Labang’s eyes were half-closed. Such position of Labang’s body proves that the animal cannot be taught — which makes the experiment reliable.

The bull’s authority is established a few paragraphs earlier:

E8. He faced the sun and from his mouth came a call so loud and vibrant that the earth seemed to tremble underfoot. And far away in the middle of the field a cow lowed softly in answer.

E9. “Why does he make that sound?” she asked. “I have never heard the like of it.” “There is not another like it,” my brother Leon said. “I have yet to hear another bull call like Labang. In all the world there is no other bull like him.”

Maria’s words indicate a lack of sensory experience, and Leon’s answer gives Labang an accolade generally reserved for human beings. Then, when Maria jokes about whether she will fall in love with the bull or feel jealous of him, it becomes clear that her competition is not with a woman, but with a place and its inhabitants. It is further supported by the father’s evaluation, which is applied at the end to the animal.

E10. “Was she afraid of Labang?” My father had not raised his voice, but the room seemed to resound with it.

This is the first serious question that the father asks about his daughter-in-law, and it does not relate to her family, beliefs, education, health, or desires. It pertains to her relationship with an animal. The noise from people in the room behind Baldo makes him realize how significant the question is, and Baldo, present at the trial without knowing it, understands that he is giving testimony at that moment.

4.3 Theme 3: The Somatic Sensorium

The trial’s evidence is gathered through the senses, and the story is explicit about which. Its dominant register is olfactory, and the frame is set at the first meeting and repeated at the last:

E11. She was fragrant like a morning when papayas are in bloom. And a small dimple appeared momentarily high on her right cheek.

The simile does more than simply praise. The fragrance of Maria is described not in relation to something that has been manufactured, such as perfume, plants, or soap, but rather compared to an agricultural morning. In Baldo's imagination, she has already been associated with the place of Nagrebcan, even before any comparisons have been made.

The sensory environment of the *Waig* is neither idyllic nor flattering:

E12. Seemingly, but a man's height above the tops of the steep banks of the *Waig*, hung the stars. But in the deep gorge the shadows had fallen heavily, and even the white of Labang's coat was merely a dim, grayish blur.

E13. The thick, unpleasant smell of *dangla* bushes and cooling sun-heated earth mingled with the clean, sharp scent of *arrais* roots exposed to the night air and of the hay inside the cart.

E13 is the most intensive statement in the text, and hardly anybody seeks to evaluate it. It represents a complex odourscape with four odors mentioned: *dangla*, which is thick and unpleasant, and *arrais*, which is pure and sharp. The narrative does not embellish; it shows a place that has a smell that could be good, but that also includes bad smells. Precisely this — an unmediated odor environment injected into the darkness of the place, through the jerking cart, which is behind the animal, is the essence of the test. Maria is supposed not to observe a scene but to find herself in it.

Her physical vulnerability is marked by a class signifier placed with great economy:

E14. She looked down once at her high-heeled shoes, then she gave her left hand to my brother Leon, placed a foot on the hub of the wheel, and in one breath she had swung up into the cart.

Her gaze acknowledges an inappropriate tool, yet with one breath, she manages to override it. Two clauses, one alteration—and again, the model of recognized problem and instantaneous adjustment occurs. When she produces verbal responses, they appear not as judgments, but as sensory comparisons:

E15. "Look, Noel, yonder is our star!" Deep surprise and gladness were in her voice. ... "It is so many times bigger and brighter than it was at Ermita beach." "The air here is clean, free of dust

and smoke."

E16. "You miss the houses, and the cars, and the people and the noise, don't you?" My brother Leon stopped singing. "Yes, but in a different way. I am glad they are not here."

Two aspects deserve attention. First, Maria's comparisons come from the world of urban, specific elements—Ermita beach, houses, cars, noise: she doesn't deny her connection to the city; instead, she uses it to compare two realities and clarify her preference. Second, E16 shows that Leon interrupted his singing to ask. Unbeknownst to him, he is being used as a test subject; however, for a brief moment, he acts as a test creator. Maria's answer rejects the binary choice given: yes, but differently.

4.4 Theme 4: Structural Paralipsis and the Uninformed Witness

The person relaying the events of the whole process is a child who does not realize what he is relaying. This is not an accident; it is actually the meaning of the story. Baldo's cognitive position is established in what he does not do: he does not ask why the road has changed, why the calesa has been left behind, or what the father is testing. Instead, he follows the commands he receives and observes.

E17. "Soon we will get out of the *Waig* and pass into the fields. After the fields is home, *Manang*." "So near already." I did not say anything more because I did not know what to make of the tone of her voice as she said her last words. All the laughter seemed to have gone out of her.

At this point, the narrative reaches its greatest effectiveness. Baldo makes a momentous observation—it seems that the laughter has vanished from her face—and makes a statement without being able to interpret it. The adult reader can immediately begin to understand what is going on: Maria has come to grips with the fact that the end of the journey is near, and that the verdict is approaching. However, Baldo does not know this. He sends the reader this information without reading it, and this discrepancy creates the story's meaning.

E18. As I passed through the kitchen, there were Mother and my sister Aurelia and Maria and it seemed to me they were crying, all of them.

The adult narrator would have been more explicit: whether they were tears of relief, joy, fear, or, finally, freedom from tension. Baldo instead can only describe a phenomenon and

hedge about it. The women's scene—the only moment when Maria is not in the presence of any man—is the scene which is inaccessible to the narrator.

E19. “No, Father, she was not afraid.” “On the way—” “She looked at the stars, Father. And *Manong* Leon sang.” “What did he sing?” “Sky Sown With Stars... She sang with him.”

The father's incomplete prompt under scrutiny (“On the way...”) implies that he uses a deposition method. Thus, by avoiding giving any specifics, he is trying to prevent any distortion of his witness's statements. Baldo is still unaware of what he is being subjected to and starts giving all the relevant information: his impressions of a lack of fear, awareness of the sky, and participation in a song. But the father's follow-up is so specific that it points to what he expects to hear — “What did he sing?”

The Genette-Baldo model is useful here, as it helps us achieve the necessary precision by using the term internal fixed focalization with the string loophole and, even more in line with Nieragden (2002) classifications, it ought to be noted that the narrator in this case reports on the events but not at any perceptive perspective level. He knows virtually everything, and his knowledge is limited.

4.5 Theme 5: The Song, and the Verdict Withheld

The song is the trial's decisive evidence, and its significance hinges on provenance.

E20. Suddenly he broke out into song and the song was “Sky Sown With Stars”—the same that he and Father sang when we cut hay in the fields at night before he went away to study.

There are three connections between the song: first, it relates to Leon's father; second, it concerns the work on the fields at night; and third, it pertains to the time before Leon's departure for Manila. The song seems to be a moving reference to the world that claims Leon because of marriage. That Leon sings the song without anyone telling him to do so gives evidence that the world still holds Leon in its power. The fact that Maria knows the song has even greater consequences.

E21. He must have taught her the song because she joined him, and her voice flowed into his like a gentle stream meeting a stronger one. And each time the wheels encountered a big rock, her voice would catch in her throat, but my brother Leon would sing on, until, laughing softly, she would

join him again.

She must have learned the song from him. Baldo is right in his observation, and it is an important one: the song must have been passed down long ago in Manila, with no one watching. It is the father's legacy, transmitted to an urban woman with the help of his son, who made her accept it.

The second sentence of E21 is the finest example of somatic notation in the story. The road interrupts her singing, and then she begins singing again. The criterion becomes just a pure kinesthetic image: it does not matter if she loves beautiful landscapes, but whether beautiful landscapes can distract her from singing. And they do distract her each time, and she starts singing again, smiling.

All the rest is just the process. It should be noted, without strong emphasis, that the comparison, like a soft stream flowing into a stronger one, puts the voice of a woman in the background with the voice of the man right at the moment of Maria's success: the endorsement of the story is real and is expressed in a gendered language that the text refuses to analyze.

The verdict, when it comes, is unstated:

E22. “Have you watered Labang?” Father spoke to me. I told him that Labang was resting yet under the barn. “It is time you watered him, my son,” my father said.

A couple comes in. The father does not pay attention to them. He talks to Baldo about the bull, about water. This instruction serves three purposes at the same time: it sends the witness away as soon as the deposition has ended; it restores the usual domestic situation where animals are hydrated and children are sent home; it also fulfills the obligation to the author of the decision. Labang has worked, is thirsty, and shall be watered.

The story closes on its opening image:

E23. I looked at Maria and she was lovely. She was tall. Beside my brother Leon, she was tall and very still. Then I went out, and in the darkened hall the fragrance of her was like a morning when papayas are in bloom.

The repetition is precise, and it serves to observe an alteration while keeping all expressions unchanged. Initially, the simile was a child's instant perception of an unknown person, and now it has become an established truth—the scent is present in the dark room, no longer coming. The verdict is sensory: Maria is now

emitting the smell that she has been tested for. In this case, the expression does the rest of the work. Tall and very still does not match the position of a woman who's been told she is welcome. She hasn't been told this. She is in a dark room, standing in front of a man who has just finished judging her without her awareness.

Five further extracts bear on the trial's framing:

E24. My brother Leon put down the two trunks on the grassy side of the road. He paid Ca Celin twice the usual fare from the station to the edge of Nagrebcan.

E25. "I am afraid. He may not like me."

E26. "Does that worry you still, Maria?" my brother Leon said. "From the way you talk, he might be an ogre, for all the world. Except when his leg that was wounded in the Revolution is troubling him, Father is the mildest-tempered, gentlest man I know."

E24 captures Leon's ability to pay more than he should, a kind of social tag at the neighborhood's entrance. E25 states that Maria has known the verdict from the beginning, which is why she remains composed in the Waig; this shows that Maria's calmness is not a sign of her innocence. E26 features the biography of his father within a subordinate clause—the wound in his leg received during the Revolution—leaving Leon with the experience of a fighter in the liberation war, who now survives in a new colonial system founded by the same colonizing power that took his son to Manila, with its roads going past his house. Thus, the trial he devises is a step by someone who has already lost one incorporation war.

E27. "You love Nagrebcan, don't you, Noel?"

E28. He did not say Maring. He did not say Mayang. I knew then that he had always called her Maria and that to us all she would be Maria; and in my mind I said 'Maria' and it was a beautiful name.

E27 is Maria's question, posed prior to the trial, and it pinpoints the problem with the marriage with an exactitude that no other character does: the enemy is a place. E28 shows a mutual process of naming—the man refuses to use the Ilocano diminutives of Maring and Mayang; Maria came up with Noel from the other way around. The two do not adopt each other's names.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Environment as Epistemic Instrument

The evidence shows that in the narrative of Nagrebcan, the presence of nature does not illustrate the storyline but gives rise to the story itself. This idea is more developed than the notion of ecocriticism, which is that scenery takes part in the plot.

Let us consider other possibilities. The father could have received Maria at home, interrogated her, watched her behavior, checked her background, or assigned her household chores, but he did not do that — he planned the itinerary instead. While previous behaviors tell what a person will show, the itinerary shows what one's body does when one is not aware of being observed. The bull can't be pleased; it is impossible to charm the blackness, and the stones under the wheels do not change their rhythm for a visitor. The father placed the responsibility of assessment on those who cannot be tricked, and this is the essence of the trial.

This creates a role for postcolonial eco criticism. The approach used in the field, which includes the notion of dispossession, slow violence, ecological imperialism, and extraction, describes nature as an object of colonial exploitation and a place of subaltern suffering. However, this approach is necessary but incomplete, as it leaves people to be treated as victims of environmental processes rather than as full users of environmental capacity. The example shows that the peasant family uses its environment to reproduce socially in the colonial context. Rahman's reasonable critique of deep ecology's applications in densely populated areas draws attention to the fact that, in this case, nature should not be perceived as wilderness to be preserved; it provides all the necessary information, and people know how to use it.

5.2 Counter-Infrastructure and the Politics of the Route

Waig's opposition to the *Camino Real* makes the Lefebvrian analysis (Aseguinolaza, 2011; Lefebvre, 1974) worthwhile. The *Camino Real* represents space in its most colonial state, since it is conceived and given a name in the colonizer's language, measured and constructed to connect points of administration—post, town, home. It represents the space of the law-maker. The Waig, on the other hand, is not conceived at all; it is a watercourse that can become a path in the dry season, known locally, traversed by local people. The father establishes an authority over his son-in-law's wife that the *camino real* does not

recognize.

The following two points arise. The first point is that the secrecy surrounding the trial (the Waig) is inherent in counter-infrastructural concepts rather than an event that merely happened by chance: routes outside the colonial regime are also outside its reach of observation. The next point is that the seasonality of the Waig is important: it exists only because it is an area of dry land. This means the father's authority is temporary; it exists only at certain points in time, showing how local authority can function within colonial regimes. Once again, soon after initiating his speech, Leon stops explaining the point.

5.3 *The Gendered Asymmetry the Story Does Not Examine*

Emphasizing only the aesthetic appeal of the father's action would be inaccurate, given the undeniable contradictory evidence: only Maria goes through the test.

Leon has left Nagrebcan for Manila, adapted to the urban lifestyle, married without apparent consultation, and is back home expecting to ride in a calesa. He is no longer as connected to his household as Maria is. He receives no judgment, nor do people wonder if he is afraid of Labang. All the father's inquiries are directed at her solely, and the whole mechanism— that is, the roads, animal, darkness, and song is geared towards one woman who is unaware that she is taking the test and has expressed her worries about it (E25). The language used by the story reflects this asymmetry: Maria's voice resembles a gentle stream connecting with a more powerful one; in fact, throughout the story she is portrayed through male perceptions, including Ca Celin's, who is mesmerized by her.

The aforementioned point does not denote a flaw attributable to historical circumstances. Nor is it a reason to reject the text. It is a discovery. Arguilla's ecological experiment is an example of patriarchal technology. It drags the inanimate world into the establishment of gender relations, achieving this even better because the process remains concealed from the person evaluated. This assumption must incorporate the referred characteristic rather than omit it.

5.4 *Paratextual Contamination and the Survival of the Consensus*

Many existing variants begin with a head section containing a brief introduction to the test, its originator, its goal, and its criterion. The effect

can then be explained in more precise terms. The meaning of the story is produced by the disparity between the information provided by Baldo and his interpretation on his part (Theme 4), and the character of that disparity makes it possible for the reader to be situated at the position of partial knowledge — somewhere in the middle between the child and the father, learning the plot as Leon does in E4. The head destroys this fact. The reader, informed beforehand of the fact that the father has created a unique test, will not find E1 surprising, E4 as an illumination, E10 as revealing the criterion, or E22 conclusive. Every structural device becomes an illustrative feature, and only the thematic trace remains now.

We propose a small bibliographic-pedagogical argument: the continuing acceptance consensus is due not only to one's reading habits but also partly to the text students are given. The solution is easy to achieve. All that it needs is to eliminate the headnote (or, preferably, to keep it but also ask the students to reread the text – first, with the gloss and then without it and describe how it has impacted their perception of the text). Servaña (2026) calls for counter-colonial reading practices and finds a particularly literal expression here: the first act of colonization to reverse is done by the anthology apparatus.

5.5 *The Strongest Objection*

The most substantial problem is that the proposed reading draws overly strong conclusions about an uncomplicated text by assuming that the father acted with clear intention, while the only certain evidence consists of two lines of dialogue uttered by a child.

This study provides three reasons for that. First, the design is multi-variable since route, vehicle, traction, and timing are changed together (E1, E3); such coordination is weak evidence of any accident. Second, the father's questioning is criterion-specific (E10, E19) because it connects to the bull's fear and the song, not the journey as a whole, suggesting he knew beforehand what could serve as evidence for him. Third, Leon being an adult who grew up in the family immediately infers design (E3, E4), which serves as the internal proof for the account. The proposed reading of the text does not require an omnipotent father or any conspiracy, but rather a father who deliberately chooses a journey.

The second objection asserts that "ecological trial" is just a new term for rite of passage. This is

dispelled in section 3, which shows that while van Gennep et al. (1961) and Turner (2017) analyzed all aspects of passage in human terms, this notion deals specifically with how it is done—by assigning verdicts to non-human agents out of sight. Some rites of passage do not involve any assigning of judgment, whereas some are connected to settings that play a literary role only.

6. Conclusion

The narrative of Arguilla's life has been interpreted for eight decades as an illustration of acceptance. Yet, it is more appropriate to characterize it as an illustration of evaluation, with the evaluative system being ecological. A parent who is unable to travel—whose leg had been hurt during an uprising that did not put an end to colonialism—gives directions for the message to be sent to his son's spouse in the dark through a riverbed with a bull and then asks a kid two questions. The response he obtains is related to something other than humans—namely, a hand that passed through a pair of horns, tired eyes, and a voice that bounced off rock and resumed functioning.

What the story is aware of, and what most of its pedagogical reception has ignored, is that belonging to an agrarian society cannot be conferred by mere declaration. It must be carried out on the body with witnesses who cannot be deceived, in an environment that does not change for visitors. The fact that this knowledge is applied in an asymmetric way—against the woman, by the patriarchal society, with the help of a suitable environment—is not a disadvantage of this knowledge but rather, its inherent aspect.

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