

# How my brother leon brought home a wife analysis



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At first I thought there were only twenty or so short stories from the American Era in the Philippines online but I have now found 100s of them. These stories represent a literary and cultural treasure and a body of work that anyone interested in colonial studies could profit from. But most important, if the four stories I have read so far are any guide, the stories are a lot of fun to read, feel like they were written from the heart, are easy to read and give us a look at a way of life gone forever. There are links to resources on Nancy's Blog and in my prior posts on this topic.

We invite anyone interested to join in. If you have never heard of any authors from the Philippines you are very welcome to learn along with us and if you have been reading in this area for 30 years, please help us out. Done long enough, we hope our project could become a real resource for those interested in the literary culture of the Philippines. We do need help in this project to start to cover all the writers.

Today I will be posting on one of the most frequently anthologized and taught in creative writing classes stories, "How Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife" by Manuel E. Arguilla. Manuel Arguilla (1911 to 1944) was from the big island of Luzon, in the north in Barrio Nagrebcan, Bauang, La Union. He grew up speaking Ilokano, the third most spoken language in the Philippines. Most of his stories are about the common people in the small town he grew up in. After finishing high school he moved to the Manila area (this had to have been a two or three day at least commute in those days) to attend the University of the Philippines, not far from where I live, in fact. He received a B. S. in education, was president of the University literary club and married Lydia Villaneuva, another talented writer we hope to post on one day.

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After graduation he taught creative writing at the University of Manila and also worked for the government at the Bureau of Public Welfare as the editor of their publication. He was a dedicated patriot and during the Japanese occupation he organized and led a secret intelligence organization against the Japanese and ended up being tortured to death by them.

“ How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife” is a story about an occasion that would be a big day in the life of any family, the day one of the sons of the family brings home the woman he intends to marry. The story is told in the first person by Leon’s younger brother. The opening of the story is just so lovely I feel a need to quote from it a bit to give you a feel for Arquilla’s elegant prose.

She stepped down from the carretela of Ca Celin with a quick, delicate grace. She was lovely. She was tall. She looked up to my brother with a smile, and her forehead was on a level with his mouth. “ You are Baldo,” she said and placed her hand lightly on my shoulder. Her nails were long, but they were not painted. She was fragrant like a morning when papayas are in bloom. And a small dimple appeared momentarily high on her right cheek. “ 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. 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.

How can you not love a sister in law or daughter in law that the family water buffalo likes as soon as he meets her. Everybody gets in a cart and Labang takes them for a ride around the small town they live in. It is the first visit of the wife to the town. She is a lady Leon met when he went to Manila to school. As I read this passage toward the close of the story you can really feel the love and the picture of the community makes me wish I could live there.

I looked back and they were sitting side by side, leaning against the trunks, hands clasped across knees. Seemingly, but a man's height above the tops of the steep banks of the Wait, 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. Crickets chirped from their homes in the cracks in the banks. 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. "Look, Noel, yonder is our star!" Deep surprise and gladness were in her voice. Very low in the west, almost touching the ragged edge of the bank, was the star, the biggest and brightest in the sky. "I have been looking at it," my brother Leon said. "Do you remember how I would tell you that when you want to see stars you must come to Nagrebcan?" "Yes, Noel," she said. "Look at it," she murmured, half to herself. "It is so many times bigger and brighter than it was at Ermita beach." "The air here is clean, free of dust and smoke."