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ON TEACHING ARCELLANA'S "THE MATS".

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FRANCISCO ARCELLANA'S "THE MATS," LIKE ANY WELL-CONSTRUCTED SHORT STORY, CAN SERVE AS AN IMPORTANT TEACHING DEVICE IN GUIDING STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE, TO READ WITH UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION, THE TECHNIQUES OF CONVERTING VERBALS BACK INTO VERBS, REPLACING ALL PRONOUNS WITH THEIR ANTECEDENTS IN PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION, AND ANALYZING FUNCTION WORDS CAN SIMULTANEOUSLY IMPLEMENT LANGUAGE RECOGNITION AND REVEAL THE AUTHOR'S CONTROLLED PURPOSES. A LOOK AT SHORT STORY WRITING TECHNIQUES--THE PLACE THE MATS OCCUPY AT THE OUTSET, THE HEIGHTENING TENSION AS THEY ARE OPENED, AND THE WAYS THEIR COLORS AND MOTIFS REVEAL CHARACTER AND THEME--WILL HELP THE STUDENTS UNDERSTAND "THE MATS" AS WELL AS TEACH THEM WHAT IS INVOLVED IN ANALYZING FUTURE STORIES. THE TEACHER SHOULD DEVELOP ONLY THAT BACKGROUND INFORMATION ESSENTIAL TO FULL APPRECIATION OF THE STORY--THE EFFECT SPANISH MARRIAGE CUSTONS HAVE ON THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF THE NUPTIAL MAT AND THE TELLTALE SYMPTONS SIGNALLING THE FATHER'S ENCROACHING INSANITY. AFTER THE STORY HAS BEEN DISCUSSED THOROUGHLY, DIVERGENT WRITTEN QUESTIONS CAN BE ASSIGNED TO DISCLOSE HOW MUCH THE STUDENTS HAVE UNDERSTOOD OF WHAT THEY HAVE READ. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE MANILA SECONDARY TEACHERS ENGLISH QUARTERLY," VOL. 17, NOS. 3-4, JULY-OCTOBER 1967.) (JB)

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ON TEACHING ARCELLANA'S "THE MATS"[1]

Tommy R. Anderson[2]

The literature teacher really has only one true objective—to get his students to read literature on their own with understanding and appreciation. If he succeeds, he opens up for them all of the treasures of the humanities. If he does not succeed, he leaves the student not simply uneducated but antieducated. By mis-exposing the student to a few pieces of literature, he has convinced the student that literature has nothing to offer him.

A literature teacher may fail in many ways. His students may lack skills essential to true reading. If so, he cannot teach them to read without building up those skills. His students may not like what he offers them to read. He may bore them by probing deeper than they care to go. Worse, he may dwell on the content of what they have already read to the exclusion of the power they should have developed to read something else of the same sort. For the most part I shall concentrate on the first of these pitfalls in what follows, but the others should be kept clearly in mind.

Francisco Arcellana's "The Mats" is one of the best short stories I have ever read. It is currently included in several high school anthologies, and I have used it with Freshman college students at PNC. The students obviously like it on first contact, but the story will repay the deepest probing that a skillful and sensitive reader can give it. These are important assets, for a story cannot be probed until it has been read, but if the student's first reading has given him all that he can get, the probing process is mere drudgery. Nothing should ever be assigned to students in the name of literature which they cannot read with enjoyment at first and then reread with profit afterwards.

So, then, the first step is to have the students read the story—or perhaps to read it to them. I prefer the latter for this story. It is short enough to read aloud in ten minutes and it reads very well aloud. I follow the reading aloud with comprehension questions which students answer in writing. During this process, they do not see the story in writing. They read it first as homework, and they answer the same comprehension questions orally the next day when their papers are handed back. This process gives the whole class—those who listen well, those who read well, and those who just copy well—a firm contact

[1] "The Mats" is one of the stories in *The Wonder World of Reading*, Book I.

[2] Language Study Center, Philippine Normal College. Professor Anderson wrote this paper for the PCV/BPS Writers' Workshop held at the U.P. last summer.

with the story. Furthermore, it helps students learn to listen and read accurately. Here are my comprehension questions:

1. Where had Mr. Angeles gone?
2. Why had he gone away from home?
3. What had he found in Mariveles?
4. What did Antonio like about new mats?
5. Why were these mats different?
6. What decided the color of the mats?
7. Who had given *Nana*[3] Emilia a decorative mat?
8. When was this mat usually used?
10. Why was dinner a long affair?
11. What advice did Mr. Angeles give his children?
12. How did Mr. Angeles open his bundle of mats?
13. Who received the first mat?
14. Describe Mr. Angeles's mat.
15. Why was Marcelina worried about her mat?
16. When could Jose use his mat?
17. Why were there some mats left over?
18. What did *Nana* Emilia say about the mats left over?
19. What did *Nana* Emilia do while the mats were being unfolded?
20. Describe the last three mats.

When students have tried to answer these, we are ready to probe into the story. And we begin at the beginning. The student pays a heavy price if he does not understand grammar.

The story starts out with two difficult sentences from which my first two comprehension questions are drawn.

> **For the Angeles Family, Mr. Angeles' homecoming from his periodic inspection trips was always an occasion for celebration. But this homecoming—from a trip to the South—was fated to be more memorable than any of the others.**

One reason these sentences are difficult is that they contain nouns and adjectives which come from verbs. We get a clearer view of what happened if we turn these words back into verbs and see what they then have to say.

"Mr. Angeles' **homecoming**"	"Mr. Angeles **came home**,"
"his periodic **inspection trips**"	"He **inspected** something **periodically** during his trips."

[3] A short form of the word *Nanay*, the word for "mother" in several Filipino languages.

"an occasion for **celebration**... for the Angeles family"
"This...was...more **memorable** than any of the others."
"This **homecoming**—from a trip to the South—"

"The Angeles family **celebrated** the occasion."
"They **remembered** this better than any of the others."
"He **came home** from a trip to the South this time,"

Sometimes this is a simple process, as in the first and last examples, and sometimes it is tricky, as in the second and fourth. But it is necessary. The practiced reader can do it subconsciously, but the beginner, especially if he knows English imperfectly, must be led through it. Notice how it forces what we know—and what we do not know—into bold relief. We know where Mr. Angeles went and why he went there, but we do not know what he does for a living. What does he inspect? Banks? Schools? Bridges? We are not told, so we must use the filler "something" and realize that we have not been told.

We can use the same technique on the second paragraph too, though the sentences do not look as hard. Try these words: mat-weaver, surprise, sleeping-mat, dominant, birthstone. Except for "our respective birthstones", which contains something like "The stones are the symbols of the respective months when we were born," these are very easy. If we had not already read the story, of course, we might wonder how Mr. Angeles expects to surprise his family with the mats when he is telling all about them in advance, but we know what he has in mind. Still, on a first reading the phrase builds up suspense, so a subconscious mastery of the grammatical technique we have used will contribute to the reader's enjoyment, even on a first reading.

But reading a short story is more than just knowing grammar. In order to read a story deeply, we must know something about the creative process that went into it. If we consult the standard manuals for creative writing, we find that the short-story writer is advised to know his characters thoroughly. He must see them in the round, and this requires him to have a fuller picture of them than he expects to need. But inevitably—and this is the real reason for the advice—he includes much of this additional detail. This is what makes his characters seem to come to life. We can probe into his characters and examine their strengths and weaknesses, their quirks and individualities, just as we can probe into real people. The third paragraph of "The Mats" provides us with an example of this. Who has the better education, *Nana* Emilia or Mr. Angeles?

> *Nana* **Emilia read the letter that morning, and again and again every time she had a chance to leave the kitchen. In the evening,**

when all the children were home from school, she asked her oldest son, Jose, to read the letter at the dinner table. The children became very much excited about the mats, and talked about them until late into the night. This she wrote her husband when she labored over a reply to him. For days after that the mats continued to be the chief topic of conversation among the children.

This paragraph contains two hints that *Nana* Emilia's schooling has been brief. She asks Jose to read the letter when it must be read aloud, and she "labors" over a reply. In other words, she is uncertain of her ability to read and she writes with difficulty. Mr. Angeles, on the other hand, inspects something. This we established in the first paragraph. It strongly suggests not only that he has achieved a certain amount of authority over others but he has deserved it through training and experience. This educational difference between *Nana* Emilia and Mr. Angeles adds a whole new dimension to the story, for as we shall see in a moment, it is *Nana* Emilia who is responsible for the strange use of the nuptial mat.

The next four short paragraphs give us our first glimpse of the Angeles family in action. We get the impression of a happy family looking forward eagerly to their father's return and anticipating the gifts he will bring. We might note, however, that the children are not really very important to the story. They are referred to simply by number—Antonio is the third child and Susana is the fifth. We shall have much more to say about these four paragraphs, however, when we consider the construction of the story, for they parallel in many ways the later section when Mr. Angeles is distributing the mats and they form an essential bridge between our initial picture of Mr. and Mrs. Angeles and the establishment of the mats as a symbol.

Parallelism in most of its forms presents real difficulties in understanding and interpretation for the average student, and the paragraph which follows is a masterpiece of parallelism.

The children knew what they were talking about: they knew just what a decorative mat was like; it was not anything new or strange in their experience. That was why they were so excited about the matter. They had such a mat in the house, one they seldom used, a mat older than any of them.

The whole paragraph consists of three sentences. The first sentence and the last sentence are each made up of three sentences. The first step in taking apart this paragraph, then, is simply to be certain that the students know exactly what its component sentences say. We can only be certain of this if we make sure that the students know how to break the long sentences down into short sentences. In this process,

we should be careful to insist that most of the pronouns are turned back into the nouns which are their antecedents.

The first sentence is rather easy. It is broken at each semicolon, and the antecedents of its pronouns are fairly clear.

> The children knew what they were talking about.
> The children knew just what a decorative mat was like.
> A decorative mat was not anything new or strange in the children's experience.

It is worth asking whether these three sentences say exactly the same thing or whether there is something in one sentence which is not found in the others. For these three sentences, we must probably answer that there is not very much difference in meaning between them. The second sentence makes "what they were talking about" more specific as "what a decorative mat was like." The third sentence turns the idea around and states it in the negative, but it is still the same idea with "knew" made a little more specific as "experience".

But the third sentence is more challenging. The students will have to reconstruct large parts of its second and third components, and there is a clear difference in the meaning of the three sentences which make it up.

> The children had such a mat in the house.
> The mat was one the children seldom used.
> The mat was older than any of the children.

The first sentence brings up the nuptial mat and the other two describe it in relation to the children, each contributing an additional detail to the picture.

The first and the third sentences are tied together by a sentence which contributes very little that is new. We have already been told that the children were excited about the mats in several different ways previously. Now we are told what we should have been able to guess from this, that they are excited because they know all about decorative mats. So, then, we already know in some sense everything in the paragraph except the descriptive details in the last two thirds of the last sentence. We may rightly ask why Arcellana is wasting our time. But, of course, the answer is obvious. He is holding something back from us. The mats are a very central part of the story, and now that he must tell us about *Nana* Emilia's nuptial mat, he must warn us in advance to pay careful attention to every detail that he gives. This warning is achieved in a subtle way by slowing the story down. Again the creative writing manuals have told us this, but they have said it

backwards. They advise the young writer not to put descriptive materials of this sort into sequences of actions. Such materials are to be incorporated at a point where the action of the story is momentarily suspended. That is precisely what this paragraph does—it suspends the action of the story so that we can concentrate on *Nana* Emilia's mat.

The background of *Nana* Emilia's mat is told with great precision. Every word in the paragraph is definite except the last two. Their indefiniteness stands out in sharp contrast to the precision of what goes before. Again, Arcellana is warning us that he is holding something back. And this time his device is strictly grammatical—we have to be able to tell the difference between definite words like "this mat", "*Nana* Emilia", "her mother", "Mr. Angeles", and "the wedding night" on the one hand and the indefinite "special occasions" on the other hand. The author is being vague—deliberately vague—and he is using the grammar of English to tell us so.

The description of *Nana* Emilia's mat is not particularly surprising except in one detail. The inscription "*Jaime y Emilia, recuerdo*" is in Spanish. Much can be inferred from this if we take it seriously, for it shows that *Nana* Emilia comes from a respectable family. It goes far to explain how she, with her little schooling, could attract and hold a man with the intellectual attainments and social position of Mr. Angeles. More than that, it opens up several lines of speculation. The Spanish wedding customs, for one thing, are such that anything associated directly with the bride in the wedding process is carefully preserved. It is supposed to bring good luck. Bad luck will follow if it is misused, lost, mutilated, or destroyed. This mat was given to *Nana* Emilia on her wedding day; it was used on the wedding night; it has remained with them ever since. It seems fair, then, to apply the tradition to it and say that it will bring good luck. It also seems fair to attach this belief to *Nana* Emilia, for it is her mat, given to her by her mother for her marriage. Finally, it is necessary that we translate the Spanish—"Jaime and Emilia, remembrance."

Now we are ready for the symbol. *Nana* Emilia's mat is used only when some member of the family is ill. The good luck that it will bring is to be associated with recovery from illness. The parallel sentences in this paragraph will obviously repay the same kind of analysis that we gave the parallel sentences above. Another point of importance is to be sure that students do not miss the negative and its effect in "not a few of them had slept on it more than once." This means that many of them had slept on it more than once—that illness was common in the Angeles household.

The next three paragraphs bring us to the heart of the symbol. Spreading the mat has become a ritual associated with illness, and illness or even death has occurred frequently. This we are told bluntly in the third of the three paragraphs and more subtly in the first of the three. But the long central paragraph embroiders the idea with a kind of horror. The mat is so beautiful that it gives pleasure even though its appearance indicates illness. *Nana* Emilia and the children enjoy seeing it spread, but it is only spread when a member of the family is sick. We are not told what Mr. Angeles thinks of this. The omission of his feelings is, of course, deliberate. It is clear by the end of the story that he does not share in his family's pleasure when the mat is spread. He may have found pleasure in spreading it with *Nana* Emilia during her first pregnancy, but it is not a symbol he wishes to have his children enjoy.

Mr. Angeles arrives home and the action of the story finally gets underway again. The first three paragraphs are preliminary, but they contain several bits of information which students must note. Mr. Angeles brings "the usual things" home with him. From this we can deduce that he spends much of his time away from home. The family knows what to expect when he comes back, for he has gone away and come back many times. We were told this earlier, in the very first paragraph, when we were told that his inspection trips were "periodic" and we see it emphasized here.

Mr. Angeles' character as an inspector is also developed. He is full of tales regarding his travels and the things he has seen, but he interrupts his tales with advice to the children. It is worth emphasizing that his advice is advice to the children, not to *Nana* Emilia.

> **I could not sleep of nights thinking of the young ones. They should never be allowed to play in the streets. And you older ones should not stay out too late at night.**

This is indirect advice, the kind of combined advice and veiled criticism that an inspector would give, but it is given to the older children. Mr. Angeles does not look to *Nana* Emilia to control the house while he is away.

The last point worth noting is found at the very end. *Nana* Emilia and the children "were all on edge about the mats," although they did not show it. The usual gifts had been opened before dinner, but the mats had not been mentioned. This is strange in itself, for the children were excited about the mats. They should have been the first thing to be pounced upon. Yet the children and *Nana* Emilia dared not ask. They must have sensed that Mr. Angeles had a special purpose in bringing them and would only bring them out in his own time.

There is an undercurrent of tension here, and this undercurrent is distilled very accurately for us by the connotation of "on edge about." When we are on edge about something, we are not simply excited about it but worried and perhaps even afraid. The family must have sensed the contradiction inherent in Mr. Angeles' telling them about the mats and then not immediately showing them the mats when he arrived.

But at last the moment comes. Mr. Angeles gets the mats and, with great difficulty, opens them. He is trembling with suppressed excitement. It is clear that he has prepared for this moment with care. He has found the mat-weaver, designed the mats, informed (or perhaps warned) his family both directly in his letters and indirectly by his delaying, and tested them to assess their reaction. Now he is ready to play out his scene, and his fingers are shaking so badly that he can not untie the knot. During all this, we are told that *Nana* Emilia watched the proceedings quietly.

Mr. Angeles has put his mats in order. The first mat is for his wife and the second for himself. Then the children receive theirs from the oldest child to the youngest in order. Each mat is intended somehow to characterize the one who receives it. For the children, the characterization is simple. The dominant color of the mat is determined by the color of their birthstone; each mat contains the child's name; each mat contains a device which indicates the occupational interest of the child. Very little actual time is spent in describing the children's mats once these facts have been established. They are established by a rather full description of the mat intended for Marcelina and a sketchy description of the mat intended for Jose. We are also informed that Jose, the oldest son, is a medical student. Finally, we are informed that the younger children—all except possibly Marcelina—will not be allowed to use their mats until they leave home.

But the description of the mats intended for Mr. and Mrs. Angeles is a much more subtle affair. The purpose is the same—to characterize the recipient accurately. *Nana* Emilia, then, is to be characterized by green and by *cadena de amor*, and it is clear that she accepts this characterization joyfully. She finds the mat even more beautiful than the one she received as a wedding gift and accepts it as a symbol of her role as wife and mother, a role characterized primarily by love. Mr. Angeles, on the other hand, is characterized by the colors purple and gold. We are told that his mat is "austere" and that his name is in purple. Purple and gold, of course, are royal colors. A king's crown is gold and his robe is purple. But during Lent the figures in church are veiled with purple cloth. Purple is also the Lenten color—the color of sorrow and mourning. It is clear that the family is aware of only

one half of this color symbolism, but then Mr. Angeles needs to place only himself here. He says quite clearly, "This mat, I know, is my own."

The appropriateness of the mats as characterizations sets everyone at ease. The mats seem to have no hidden message. The children can talk about them, take pleasure in them, anticipate their use at sometime in the future in a completely self-centered and uninhibited way. Mr. Angeles can join in their pleasure unreservedly. This is how beauty should be enjoyed—looking forward to a happy future with anticipation. It should not be accompanied with pain or suffering. Hence when *Nana* Emilia notices that there are some mats which are not unfolded, Mr. Angeles seems to be "jerked away from a pleasant fantasy." He was waiting for *Nana* Emilia to notice the mats; he had been listening for her to say something; he was the only one who heard her say it. And yet all this had been subconscious, for when she did say it, "a puzzled reminiscent look came into his eyes." He had forgotten all about the mats that remained to be unfolded and he had to recall them with effort.

The remaining mats were for the dead children, and they were also characterizations. They characterize the children as dead, for their colors are dull, the devices which should symbolize their future are missing, and they "did not seem to glow or shine with festive sheen." But this characterization is an afterthought, a device for concluding the story. What is important is the effect that these three mats have on the living participants. The children are shocked into silence. They have never thought much about their three dead sisters; even the names seem strange. They know about the dead, of course, but it is clearly a second-hand knowledge. After all, they are only children.

The effect on Mr. Angeles is more startling. He becomes a complete stranger. His motions are swift and savage. He demands; he calls; he speaks as if to strangers and subordinates. His voice is harsh, vindictive. He no longer interacts with the living children. We suspect he hardly sees them. But he does react to *Nana* Emilia, and his reaction is to reproach her because she has not remembered. Taken in the context of the mats as a symbol, this is a clear reference to the inscription on the nuptial mat. Taken in the context of the dead children and the strange use of the nuptial mat, it amounts to a denial of the idea that the mat can bring good fortune to the sick. Taken in the context of his unwillingness to treat *Nana* Emilia as the head of the house, it seems to be a criticism which might almost say that she is responsible for the deaths of the three children—responsible both in the sense that she tempted them to be sick with her beautiful

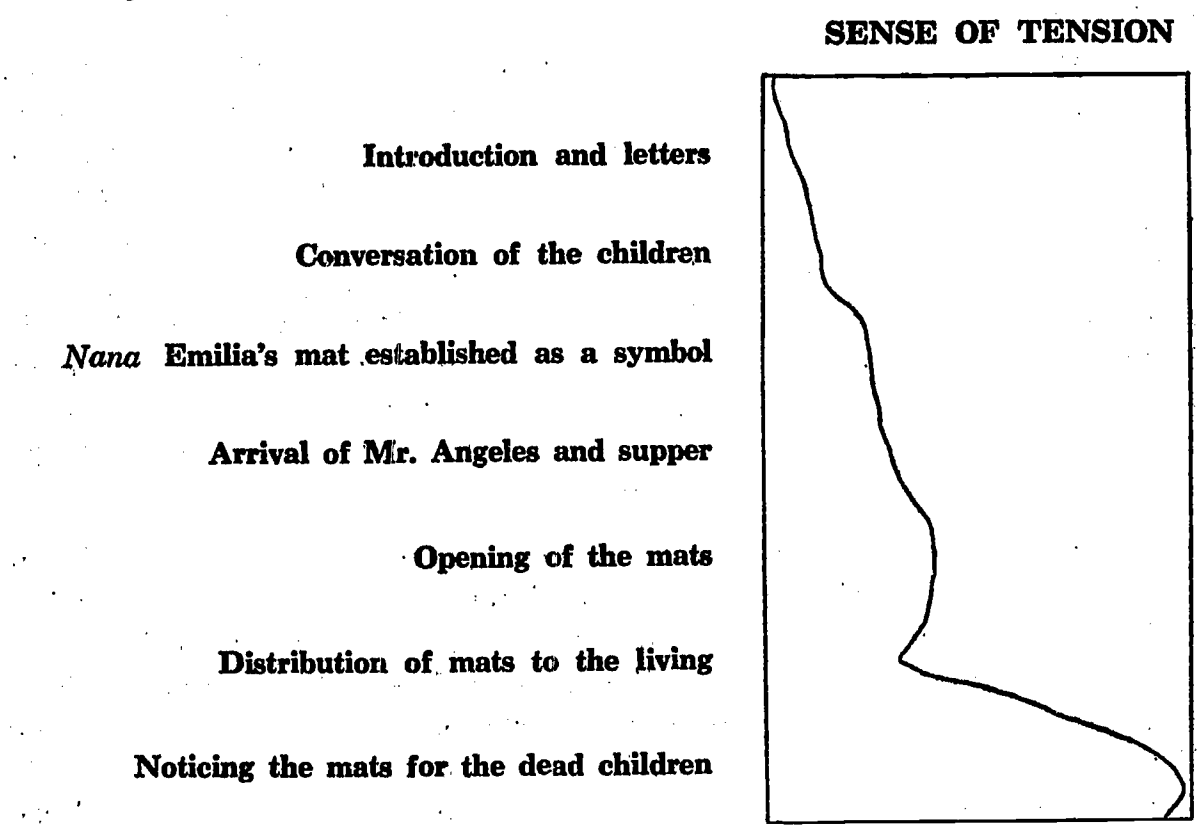
mat and in the sense that she relied upon the mat to make them well rather than upon competent medical attention. It is no accident that Mr. Angeles's eldest son will be a doctor.

Nana Emilia understands much of this and is hurt by it. But she is more than hurt. She is "sorely frightened" by it. Her husband has acted insanely, and she has good reason to be afraid. The most obvious insanity is that he has bought mats for dead children, but there are many other things. There is the way he talks, hysterically, impersonally, vindictively. He is detached from reality and hardly sees his children. His hatred, and it clearly is hatred, is directed toward *Nana* Emilia, and he reacts to no one else.

To a Filipino clinical psychologist, the evidence for Mr. Angeles's insanity is overwhelming. Sleeplessness, a tendency to cut oneself off from others, an inability to say directly what one feels, and a tendency to detach oneself from reality are four of the most frequently reported symptoms of insanity among Filipino patients and Mr. Angeles has all four of them. He has driven himself almost insane by brooding upon his dead children. His insanity has found an outlet in that he suspects his wife of virtually murdering the children. He will avenge himself, and his wife must live under the shadow of this insanity knowing that her husband may run amuck at any time and that she will be his first victim. There is no violence in this story, but there is a prelude to terrible violence. Arcellana is artist enough to leave it there, leaving no doubt of the end but still not telling it.

A story like this does not come out spontaneously. It is as carefully designed and constructed as a fine watch, and students should appreciate the constructional processes which have brought it about. It is said that the study of literature is valuable because it gives us a sense of order and of disorder, and that sense, if we are really to develop it at all, must involve more than just a reaction to the story content. The story also has a form, and that form needs to be made intelligible. The first four paragraphs of the story constitute an introduction. They briefly characterize Mr. and Mrs. Angeles and tell us that Mr. Angeles is bringing home some mats for his children. As yet this sounds ordinary enough, but the second four paragraphs warn us that it is not. The children are excited because they know what a decorative mat is, and they know because they have such a mat. The next six paragraphs establish the mat which they have in our minds as a symbol. Then once again we need a bridge to get the story moving again, and the four paragraphs which follow provide such a bridge. The opening of the mats and the distribution of the mats to the living represent two

further steps that bring the story to its climax, and with the words "Then *Nana* Emilia noticed bewilderedly that there were some more mats remaining to be unfolded," the climax arrives. The traditional denouement consists only of the last paragraph. Since the climax of the story is not the true climax of the action, however, our tension is not relaxed by this conclusion. We can diagram the action in the story this way:



I think there is nothing new or unconventional in this analysis of form except possibly that many teachers of literature forget to do it.

This brings us full circle. My discussion of "The Mats" is not intended primarily as literary criticism. Rather, I wish to point out important techniques for the teacher of literature. In this analysis I have used a number of techniques, but by no means all that are valuable. I would like to conclude by pointing them out specifically.

First, there is grammatical analysis. We have applied three types of grammatical analysis to various parts of this story. Near the beginning, we found it desirable to turn nouns and adjectives back into the verbs from which they originally came. We did not follow it up, but a teacher of literature should never let it drop. Suppose we had considered the meaning of "decorative mat". Clearly "decorative" comes from the verb "decorate". The idea involved is that the mat is used to decorate the house. This is the whole difference grammatically be-

tween "a decorative mat" and "a decorated mat." But, of course, the children and *Nana* Emilia did not use their decorative mat for this purpose. I have saved this bit of insight as an afterthought to emphasize once again how pervasive and how rewarding this technique can be. We used the second grammatical technique of importance in our analysis of parallelism. Long sentences were broken down into shorter sentences, and the short sentences were compared to see what each one contributed. A teacher of literature should resort to this technique for every sentence which students meet which is syntactically complex whether parallelism is involved or not. Lastly, we have used a technique which can be characterized as one of taking function words seriously. The significance of English articles and the effect which a negative has are two different applications of this technique, but there are many others. Verb tenses, prepositional usage, and many other details of sentence construction will call for deliberate treatment from time to time. Teachers of English have usually thought of grammar as largely a question of production—of not making mistakes. We are using it here, however, as a tool of recognition, and this constitutes a major innovation in the literature teacher's technique.

A second technique which we have employed is that of considering good short-story writing practice. Teachers of composition and creative writing have known for a long time how such things as characterization or description should be handled. We have evolved set patterns for doing these things. To some extent the patterns are arbitrary, a part of our literary culture, and might be different in another literary culture. In part they are not arbitrary but reflect the physical realities of the world and the psychological realities of readers and writers. It rarely occurs to the literature teacher, however, that she has as much of an interest in equipping her students with these techniques as the teacher of creative writing has. Yet, what one man writes, he intends another man to read. The reader must know a good deal about conventions of writing, far more than how to interpret the punctuation marks and paragraph indentions. A sensitive reader must already have learned much about the rudiments of creative writing, and the only choice this leaves the literature teacher is whether to let it be done accidentally by someone else or whether to do it properly and fully herself.

We have supplied the student with a good deal of background information. The story does not discuss Spanish wedding customs or the most frequent symptoms of insanity in the Philippines, but we will lose much if we do not know about these things. The teacher of literature must provide them. They are an essential part of the background of the story which the students may not know by themselves and which

they can not get out of the story itself. But we have not introduced these ideas simply for window dressing. We have not discussed the personal experiences of the author. We have not said where "The Mats" was first published or when. We have not tried to place it in the development of Arcellana's thinking. Very often the teacher of literature will provide this kind of information too, and once in a while it will be necessary and helpful information. But in general the only background information which the teacher should provide in teaching literature is information which will contribute to understanding the literature being taught, and far too much of our background information does not contribute to this. In fact there are teachers of literature who might be more properly called teachers of the biographies of writers. I am prejudiced against such people by having taken about 30 units of course work under them in college. I am convinced that they contribute a great deal to a healthy dislike of literature among the masses.

Finally, we have used a technique which was once associated with literary criticism. We have diagrammed the action of the story and shown that it has a structure in very much the same way as Aristotle indicated we could do it in his **Poetics** written 2,300 years ago.

Perhaps it is worth noting that there is one thing we have not done. We have appreciated the story, but we have not moralized about it. We have not tried to say either what any of the characters will probably do or what any of the characters should have done at some time in the past. Such moralizing, if it is to be done at all, can only be done when the whole story is understood and can best be done by the student himself thinking individually. If we are to moralize about this story, then, let's make it a written assignment which the students can do after they have really discussed the story down to its bottom. Such an assignment is likely to show more clearly than we think how much or how little the students have really understood. An example of such a moralizing topic might be the following: If you were (*Nana* Emilia, Marcelina, Jose), how would you get the family to go to bed after such a dramatic scene? The student who can write coherently on that will really understand the story thoroughly, but I don't think the answers will be either stereotyped or overly conditioned by school book attitudes of right and wrong.