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# Problematizing the Filipino Hero in the Graphic Novels of Arnold Arre

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Two-time Manila Critic Circle Book Award winner Arnold Arre's appropriation of local culture in his graphic novels through the use of mythology and popular media is an interesting phenomenon not only in popular culture but also in understanding the Filipino's dynamic concept of hero in today's complex world. It problematizes how heroes are depicted, which, in itself, is constitutive of the Filipino experience of modernity and globalization, along with the contradictions he confronts in everyday living.

Focusing on Arre's graphic novels, the study analyzes each major character in terms of his archetypal function and folkloric characteristics in relation to the Filipino experience of modernity and globalization through the appropriation of brief references to *komiks* and other forms of comics.

The findings yield that the archetypal pattern and framework show peculiar similarities with specific characters and direct allusions to folklore as rendered within the context of the Filipino experience of modernity and globalization, particularly on how the archetypal pattern of these modern heroes are affected and conditioned by present-day culture, as dictated by socioeconomic conditions and the capitalism of self-reflectivity and identity construction. The results of this study, therefore, contribute to the growing literature on popular comics.

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**Keywords:** Comics, graphic novels, Filipino folklores, archetypal heroes, postmodernism, globalization

## Introduction

Comic books are a generational experience (Wright, 2000). Being the domain of the young, they are eventually outgrown and looked at with both nostalgia and concern. Even so, no one can deny its framing of worldviews that deal with the shifting interaction of politics, culture, audience tastes, and economics. The term *comic book* is, in fact, one of the great misnomers in entertainment, for they are not books and not quite often



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comical. Since its inception, the comic book has explored every genre of popular entertainment, including horror, adventure, mystery, crime, romance, and humor. Humor here, as it is comical, deals with a lighthearted look on either the working class or the rich through social satire and manners. And in a more serious note, comic books have also engendered issues on sexuality and social inequality.

As with the overall study of popular culture, the serious study on comic books is fairly recent. However, in the West, early superficial studies portrayed comic books as bad influences to the youth, as Fredric Wertham (1954) insinuated in his controversial book *Seduction of the Innocent*. This gave comic books a negative reputation for nearly 40 years.

But much later theorists have, in turn, viewed comic books with a more scholarly approach. Comic books then became significant cultural artifacts that gave scholars a different view about societies (Hall & Lucal, 1999), racism (Singer, 2002), body politics (Brown, 1999), and craft (McCloud, 1993). These studies on a medium considered by many as a lowbrow form of entertainment are a testament to how comic books are both reflective and indicative of the ever-changing aspects of society.

In the Philippines, only a few notable studies on comic books have been conducted; many of which are credited to Soledad Reyes, who gave her efforts to give significance to the study of Philippine popular literature. According to Reyes (2009), *komiks* magazines have, in their own way, undergone three major phases. In the late 1920s, Kenkoy showed how certain Filipinos could be comical in mimicking their big white brother. His dialogues were a confused, mix language of English, Tagalog, and

Spanish, symptomatic of the Filipino's fragmented identity. Such caricatures of typical Filipinos during his time looked at their current social and cultural structure with both amusement and criticism. Then other artists reconstructed the wistfulness past as though a reaction against the decadence of the present. Such was Francisco V. Coching's romantic style through his series of titles like *Hagibis*, *Sabas*, *Ang Barbaro*, among others. In Coching's world, readers got a glimpse of what it meant to be an *indio* in a system dominated by Spaniards. But the impact of the Second World War left lasting scars that even the way stories were created in *komiks* was affected. Later stories in the 1950s showed the grim reality of poverty, corruption, and exploitation with stark illustrations that no longer resembled the smooth and pleasantly clean comic drawings of the earlier age. Up until its final years, such a sordid world-view permeated much of the *komiks* stories.

Yet even if faced with such social and political problems, certain artists, with Tony Velasquez once more at the helm, were still able to entice laughter through characters like Pongyang Halobaybay, Nanong Pandak, and Kalabog and Bosyo by Larry Alcala. And up to recent times, many have followed suit, giving life to characters that display a satirical, if not a lighter look on Filipino Life: Pol Medina Jr.'s Polgas of *Pugad Baboy*, Manix Abrera's characters in *Kikomachine*, *Pupung* by Washington "Tonton" Young, among others.

Then there were others who still continued to use a genre that lasted all throughout the three transitions of *komiks*: fantasy. To say the least, because of the effects of many sociopolitical upheavals since Jose Rizal's time, the last surge of *komiks* has

shown polarities of stark realism and romantic fantasy (Reyes, 2009).

Among all other genres that permeated *komiks*, it is fantasy that has the most lasting effect. Reyes (2009) believes that it is because of fantasy's ability to elicit both desire and disturbance that entices the reader to pit what is real from the unreal. Moreover, much of the Filipino fantasy's conventions were inherited from the deep roots of local folklore and legends that continue to be invoked even in today's society. Apparently, many fantasy titles, most especially in the superheroes of Mars Ravelo and the off-beat characters of Carlo J. Caparas, originated from folkloric elements.

Arnold Arre's deep fascination with native folklore has imbued these same qualities, such as the use of talismans and otherworldly characters from lower mythologies, into some of his graphic novels. As the reign of *komiks* magazine finally came to a close, marked by the cessation of the *Atlas komiks* line (the last of the contemporary giant publications) in 2007, several recent publications (including the wave of alternative comics during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) have been much influenced by current trends abroad (Valiente & Fermin 2007). Although Arre is also affected by these trends, his fascination and concern for local culture remains unabated. It is in this sense that he has influenced much of the local fantasy as compared with his contemporaries.

These influences on the artist, whether local or foreign, are proof enough of the holding power of comics over each generation. Comics, in fact, define a sense of identity for those who grew up with them; and inevitably, these same readers have given comic books a lasting mark on other media and cultures. The most recent have many of these *komiks*



**Figure. 1**

From the book *Ikabod: Sooo Pinoy*, copyright 1985, Nonoy Marcelo (Published by Atis Palimbagan)



**Figure. 2**

"Bullies" - Martial Law Babies

characters come to life, either transitioned into television serials, where Mars Ravelo's *Darna* enjoyed two remakes, or adapted for the big

screen like the planned film project of GMA Films featuring *Ang Mundo ni Andong Agimat* with Dingdong Dantes in the lead role.

The works of present-day artists, like Arre, often subtly resembled their identified heroes either intentionally or subconsciously. For instance, in *Martial Law Babies*, Arre revealed certain scenes as a tribute for the late Nonoy Marcelo, the creator of the politically influenced strip *Ikabod*. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

### Prime Influences in Cartooning

As a means of also reaching foreign readers, Arnold Arre drew his characters as light and cartoon-like, a style familiar in many Western and Japanese comics. His use of loose and open curves in his character drawings is most efficient in portraying distinctive facial features and expressions, specifically through their large eyes. This is quite common to both the Western and the Japanese cartoon, though it is most often attributed to Japanese comic books called *manga*. (See Figures 3a and 3b.)



**Figure. 3a**  
Marshall Blueberry (1963) - Jean  
"Moebius" Giraud

In Arre's characters' expression, Japanese emotional indicators (most common in Japan's anime cartoons and *manga*, such as those used in Figure 4a in which exaggeratedly large sweat beads may indicate nervousness) are,



**Figure. 3a**  
Domu (1980) - Katsuhiro Otomo

however, not entirely used. Instead of having emotions symbolized by these indicators, he only made slight exaggerations on his characters' posture, gesture, and most especially facial expression. This is exemplified in Figures 3a and 3b.

Accordingly, Arre's prime influences both come from these western and eastern comic art forms. When it comes to landscapes and cityscapes, Arre is much influenced by a French artist named Jean Giraud, purportedly one of the most influential illustrators in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His style, ranging from extreme



**Figure. 4a**  
Domu (1980) - Katsuhiro Otomo

realism to dream-like landscapes, could evoke a wild and imaginative atmosphere. His graphic style could also change dramatically and adapt to the style and the tone of any story given to him, something that Arre has always aspired to do. Because of the exotic



Figure. 4b

"The Diwata Dance" - The Mythology Class

beauty of Giraud's futuristic cities – most notably in his work with Dan O'Bannon in the short story comic book *The Long Tomorrow* (1988) – Arre continuously recreates his backgrounds to adapt to the moods his stories try to evoke.

Another influence comes from one of Japan's leading Japanese manga (comics) illustrator, Katsuhiro Otomo, the creator of the much-acclaimed epic *Akira* (1982). His photo-realistic details in landscape, technological devices, and most especially his vehicle designs landmarked him as a cultural phenomenon. Arre often tries to emulate Otomo's character expressions and use them as bases to develop his own style in character rendering.

Although Arre credits Giraud's and Otomo's works as his major influences, it seems that his illustrations also bear similarities with those of several other artists, significantly the character illustrations of Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez (1980) in their seminal comic book series *Love and Rockets*.



Figure. 5

"The blond and blue-haired female characters" - Arnold Arre

## Appropriated Features of the Hero

Several of Arre's character illustrations show signs of foreign semblances, specifically slight European and Japanese features such as having thin, pointed noses, thin lips, and large eyes; and there are a few of his women whose white streaks of hair make an impression that they are either supposed to be blond or have a different hair color. (See Figure 5.)

In his *The Mythology Class*, characters taken from local folklore bear significant differences from their original context. The epic hero, Lam-ang, has always been conceived as a virile, young man, while Sulayman is depicted to be a bit older. In many interpretive illustrations coming from various children's books and textbooks, all Filipino epic heroes are drawn dressed in native clothing. The men wore short-sleeved and collarless jackets, whose length reached slightly below the waist. Historically, the color of the jacket appeared

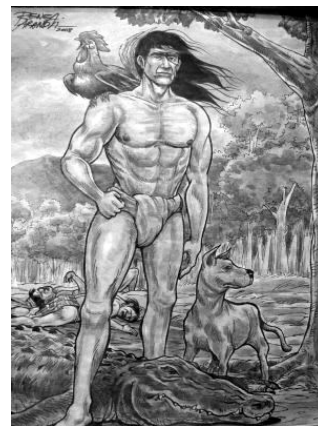
to indicate the position of the wearer in society, e.g., red for the chief and blue or black for those below him, depending on the societal class. For the lower part, they wore a *bahag*, a strip of cloth wrapped around the waist, passing between the thighs. Their thighs and legs were left exposed. A piece of cloth wrapped around the head called a *putong* served as a head gear. To give additional information, the kind of *putong* one wore was also important. For example, a red *putong* meant the wearer had killed a man in war while one who had killed at least seven people signified so by wearing an embroidered *putong*. They also wore necklaces, armlets or *kalombiga*, earrings, rings, and anklets, usually made of gold and precious stones.

Arre's rendition of these native heroes, however, is different and much modernized. Even at a glance, one can immediately see how his character illustrations are influenced by foreign elements. Lam-ang appears as a middle-aged man who looks more like an Afro-American than a native Filipino. (See Figures 6a and 6b.)

The physical attributes are, of course, strikingly different as Lam-ang is basically attributed to Ilocano folklore — which was, in turn, borrowed from the Tinggian tales (Calip, 1957) — pointing out to his more popular rendition as having a straight hair and brown complexion. According to Calip, Lam-ang is supposed to be of Isneg origin — one of the earliest settlers of the Apayao Province (“Apayao Data,” 2014).



**Figure. 6a**  
“Arre’s Lam-ang”



**Figure. 6b**  
The Classical Lam-ang

More radical is the change in Sulayman’s appearance who obviously is Western in his features. Not only does he sport a long, white/blond hair, he has a sharp nose, and his cheeks are somewhat high and his chin is long. He wears glasses and a trench coat, far from how he was originally depicted in mythology. (See Figures 7a and 7b.)





**Figure. 7a**  
Present Sulayman

This comparison, however, must not be misconstrued as pertaining to the origins of Arre's character, for the fictional Sulayman is, in fact, taken from the Tuaang Bagobo epic, "Indarapatra at Sulayman." Even with the striking similarities on clothing between Carlos Francisco's rendering of Rajah Soliman with that of the Bagobo (See Figures 7c.), Arre's character was never rendered as such on both accounts.



**Rajah  
Soliman  
ni Carlos 'Botong' Francisco**

**Figure. 7b**  
Classic Soliman Image— Carlos "Botong"  
Francisco

Figure 7b shows Carlos Francisco's rendition of the historical Rajah Soliman, a depiction that pertains to the ethnic appearance of our traditional heroes.



**Figure. 7c**  
Bagobo Warrior

Now, the women of mythology are also originally illustrated to have worn their native clothing. Their upper garment was a sleeved jacket, called a *baro*. Over their skirts (*saya* or *patadyong*) was wrapped a strip of cloth called *tapis*. They also wore gem-studded bracelets, necklaces, rings, and gold earrings. And, like the men, they are often bare-footed. In Datimbang's case, a very old woman character named Mrs. Enkanta in the *Mythology Class* can be mistaken as any ordinary professor



**Figure. 8**  
“Mrs. Enkanta” - The Mythology Class



**Figure. 9**  
“War: The Past and the Present” -  
The Mythology Class

with a short, white hair and wears a coat and glasses. (See Figure 8.)

Aware of the changes in the appearance of his characters, Arre made a point of illustrating how the appearance is influenced by modernity by showing a scene where the past and the present collided during one of the major battles in the novel. (See Figure 9.)



**Figure. 10a**  
“Carnage” - Copyright Marvel  
Entertainment

Even his illustrations of mythical creatures were also changed. The way he drew the *siokoy* that thrived in Pasig River resembled an enormous insect more than being the original half-man half-fish. His rendition of the *tiyanak* that haunted a hospital in Manila looks like a diminutive version of one of Marvel Comics’ well-known character villain, Carnage. (See Figures 10a and 10b.)

According to Arre (2005), the idea of how the *aswangs* look like came from the *blue meanies* characters from the 1968 animated film *the Yellow Submarine* of the British band, The Beatles (See Figure 11a.). In later stages of development, the *aswangs* eventually became lizard-like in form. (See Figure 11b.)





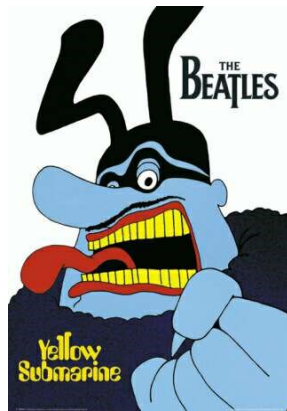
**Figure. 10b**  
“Tiyanak” - The Mythology Class



**Figure. 11b**  
“Aswangs” - The Mythology Class

Deprived of any redeeming values, the *aswangs* are illustrated to be more lizard-like and no longer having human-like qualities and as with most descriptions of the *tikbalang* that has hooves for feet, Arre’s version is simply a huge man with a horse’s head.

These appropriations in his illustrations are indeed significant signs of the present culture that determined the artist’s worldview, inflected only by his own prejudices. At most, these appropriations are indicative of the artist’s aim to appeal to the contemporary mass audience who are, like him, culturally alienated from their folkloric traditions brought about by the state of modernity and heavy foreign influence.



**Figure. 11a**  
“The Blue Meanie” - The Yellow Submarine (1968)

## The Use of Artistic Conventions in Comics

One must never forget that in most cases, the production of comics is a collaborative one, composed of a writer and an illustrator. The outcome of a comic book, whether in terms of art style or story rendering, relies heavily on the communication and relationship of the two. The writer's role is to deliver his message, as well as his illustrative instructions to the illustrator as clear as possible. Whereas for the illustrator, his function is to draw into image what is nearest to the writer's intent. Each may have his own ideas regarding how the story should be delivered. It can be that at the very beginning, the two will already be planning on the overall look of the comic book from character to story. It is either that the writer will instruct the illustrator how his character and/or story must look like, or the artist will show a proposal to the writer his own ideas even before the entire story is plotted out. What is clear, however, is that it is on the writer that depends on how much freedom is given to the illustrator in expressing his own ideas on what the final outcome of the comic book will be. As for the case of Arnold Arre, being both the writer and illustrator gives him total freedom in both areas.

Perhaps, one convention that became apparent among all independent creators is on how the illustrations are done in black-and-white and set on photocopy book papers. This, of course, is rational as it cuts production and coloring cost by simply running the whole printing process through a photocopy machine, making the entire production economical. Arnold Arre followed this convention all throughout simply for two reasons: first, as mentioned, it is economical; second, black-and-white illustrations enhance the artist's drawing

skills. As compared with the obtrusion of coloring an illustration, black-and-white drawings have a tendency to make pronounced all the illustration's intricate details. The use of photocopied materials is also the common production of most early indie or self-published comics, just as how many of Arre's works were printed.

In Japanese manga, such is also commonly done both as an act of simplicity and as an exploration of drawing skills. And so for each graphic novel, Arre used black and white to render his backdrops in various moods through details.

To begin with, almost all of Arnold Arre's graphic novels are self-published under his own publishing company, Tala Comics. The exemptions are *After Eden* (2002), which was published by Anino, a faction of Adarna House that is well known for its publication of children's books; and *Martial Law Babies* (2008), which was published by the now acclaimed Nautilus Publishing, well-known for their National Book Award comics collection *Siglo*. His first graphic novel, *The Mythology Class*, was in fact first independently published as a four-part book series until Adarna Publishing reissued it years later as a single graphic novel. To note, this attention to the graphic novels' publication is significant as the very look of any finished graphic novel is indicative of the demands of the publishing body it is delivered through. Arre's self-publication enables him to have full autonomy over his creations, and he is answerable only to himself on whatever the content of his creations may be. In terms of production cost, however, both Nautilus and Adarna have not applied any surface similitude, which is to say to have followed the production conventions of Western comics publication as

it is costly. Instead, they have published the graphic novels by printing them on ordinary book paper, and then soft-bound them in a high-quality book-weave form. As for Arre's self-publications, the production cost is much cheaper, making many of his own published books a bit unstable in which the pages fall away from the seams. But even with this disadvantage, the self-published titles are still bought by many collectors for the sake of their content.

Despite the promises of artistic freedom in self-publishing, Arre has intermittently followed certain market-proven conventions that make up many of his titles. Two of these conventions are worth discussing; the first being the use of type text symbols as replacement to curses and contemnns. This regulation is quite common to many comic book lines as it prevents such unacceptable use of bad language to be printed. This convention was, in fact, an act of self-censorship done by many comic book publications ever since the U.S. Senate inquiry on the moral integrity of the publications made against William Gaines during the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in America in 1954.

In line with this is the second convention, which is on nudity and sexual acts. Most mainstream comic books avoid showing much nudity and sex, and only those comics that fall under "for mature readers" have done so but only within acceptable limits. Arre may have drawn many scantily clad women in provocative poses, but he limits himself from displaying frontal nudity or even characters in sexual intercourse in order not to offend any reader. As shown in Figures 12a, 12b, and 12c, the notion of sex may be self-regulated; yet at times, Arre has pushed his regulations to the limits of decency.



**Figure. 12a**  
"Shower Scene" - The Mythology Class



**Figure. 12b**  
"Makiling's Dance" - The Mythology Class





**Figure. 13**  
 “Getting Information” - Andong Agimat

It is no wonder then that despite being a medium that is supposed to be commonly attributed to minors and young adults, most graphic novels, including many of the works of Arnold Arre, usually handle topics that bear adult themes. To make his entire work appealing and acceptable to the Filipino masses, Arre used said conventions. The same is the case for his violent scenes where he avoids as much as possible any blatant form of gore and mutilation. Most of them are, in fact, implied just as the example in Figure 13.

The only convention used by most mainstream comic books is on the way they self-classify their own creations according to the age bracket issued by American comic book

publishers’ very own Comics Code Authority (Wright, 2000).

Arnold Arre has always had different visions of the world and his characters thrived in them. However, all visions seem to bear a slight tinge of familiarity. Whether a rendition of an idyll, small-town life, or a distorted vision of a decadent city, or even a wild view of the future, each bear a semblance to the world we live in. Some of these places, like that of UP Diliman, are direct references to real localities included as part of the entire narrative.

Much like in prose literature, the background is as important as the characters. The atmosphere is connected with what will happen to the character. Because comics is visual, the background becomes immediate and apparent. For each novel, a certain mood is depicted by Arre’s art style. The art style here depends on how much detail Arre would assign to the backdrop and depending on the theme of the story. What is ingenious of this approach is that it proves to be effective in amplifying the point of the story as well as its impact to the reader.

To further analyze the concept of hero in his graphic novels, a close-reading examination of the protagonists from each of the graphic novels through both the narrative and the illustrated structure must be employed.

### The Graphic Hero of Arnold Arre

Nearly every hero in all of Arnold Arre’s graphic novels has always emanated a feeling of alienation and restlessness. They are, to put it metaphorically, orphans separated from the womb of the comforting

world of their romantic past. They are lost, unsure of what the future will bring for them. All of them, indeed, bear this romantic notion of the past: sentimental and idealistic. Yet they are also disillusioned with the present. Often, they are found to be in a contemplative mood, brooding on their biased comparison between the past and the present state of things. This is quite similar to the results of the study conducted by Fr. Tony Cajilig, C.M. (1974) where the Filipino hero remains introspective of his dilemma, isolating himself in his personal tragedy.

In their broodings, they will often be adulating how beautiful the past was and see the present as decadent and undesirable. But the take-off point here is that in Arre's hero, despite his circumstance, he is defiant, a bit hopeful, no matter how difficult it can be for him to convince others not merely to relive the good old days but to at least follow their virtues. It is, to this hero, the only solution to regain the dignity society has lost a long time ago.

Arre's effort to sustain his audience prompted him to simplify the illustrations of his heroes, incorporating cartooning and stereotyping to have immediate character identification and an understanding of his conditions. This led to the appropriation of foreign conventions that are widely accepted as an effective narrative tool. Now, it cannot be avoided that, visually speaking, many of Arre's characters have semblances of many international mainstream styles as Arre himself admitted in adapting some foreign conventions.

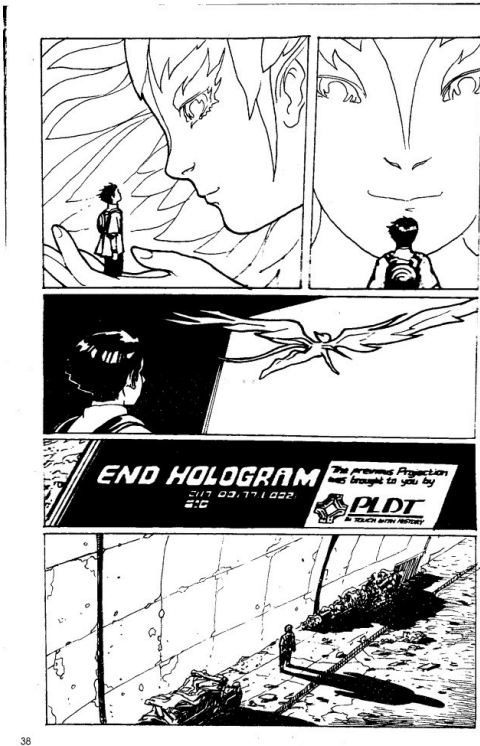
Even at the onset, many illustrations of our folk narratives had already been supplanted with European such as Greek images. Alabado (2001) writes the accounts of Dr. Maximo

Ramos, foremost cultural anthropologist, concerning this issue regarding the early children's books on Philippine folktales. And because it were the Americans who were more serious about preserving such culture, their illustrators found it hard to visualize many of these folk heroes. In the end, the illustrators must "borrow" from their Western myths just to supplement folk motifs. And so it is said that with these types of book, many children have now found it difficult to recognize their Filipino idols and would rather regard the foreign invaders as their heroes (Alabado, 2001). This is, perhaps, on the account of our strewn and varying beliefs about our own gods and heroes that many writers and illustrators of these books have experienced difficulty in making any accurate image. Subsequently down the ages, the original visual image of the Filipino hero was already nearly lost. And for Arre, perhaps, like the early children's books illustrators, he had little to go by when it comes to local *komiks* and must also borrow from foreign conventions of alternative Western comics. Not only has he done this in his art, but also on his narrative, which is heavily influenced by the monomythic convention.

All of Arnold Arre's stories have traces of Campbell's monomyth, where the hero is separated from his cozy environment and is tossed into an exotic world only to undergo a psychological and spiritual transformation. From there, he must find a boon or whatever he aims to achieve, fight the ultimate evil, and in the end, reign triumphant in his goal and may be given a decision to go back to his normal life, carrying with him the prize for his actions. For the *Mythology Class*, it is fairly easy, where the only means for both worlds to retain the spiritual balance is to capture the wayward *enkantos* and finish off the



last remaining *aswangs*. In *Ang Mundo ni Andong Agimat*, the root of evil is embodied by an *impakto* named Zolgo, the being who claims responsibility for many of the ills and calamities that befell the Philippines. All Ando has to do is to help his friends find the earth goddess Maria Makiling, and slay the beast.



**Figure. 14**  
“Advertising Values” - Trip to Tagaytay

To identify the monomyth of *Trip to Tagaytay* is a little tricky as it portrays the hero's quest as an internal journey. The trip to Tagaytay is but a dropping point to another destination, Cebu. Still, certain elements of the monomyth is present, particularly the hero's meeting of the goddess (See Figure 14.) on where the truth, or the semblance of it, is revealed to him via the holographic advertisement of PLDT.

So, too, is the journey of Allan in *Martial Law Babies* in which he recalls his whole life while on his way to greet his friend Rebecca farewell. Again, the goddess is met in the form of his long-time crush Marissa, who is now a mother. From her, he realized how he must let go of the past and move on with his life. The meeting with the goddess, or for the *Mythology Class* the god as the hero here is female, is somewhat a recurring aspect of these graphic novels. As it is, their meeting the goddess also grants them their epiphany, realizing then the meaning of their struggles and eventually their purpose (Campbell, 2004).

Along with his appropriation of Western art and narrative, Arre's hero is subsequently conditioned to follow suit. His traditional heroes are exceptional men whose valor and honor are untainted, making them strange and naïve in measurement by present society's standards. Naturally, they are born leaders who are gifted with physical splendor, unmeasured strength, admirable intellect, sheer courage, and determination. What is more is on their admirable nobility in character. But again with what the world is today, these same qualities seem exaggerated or parodied to some degree, kitsch of the real thing. Some, like Sulayman of the *Mythology Class*, appear stilted and worn, often high in his ego-trip. Lam-ang appears quite inhuman and god-like, Kubin as a man naïve of the world around him. His exceptional heroes never left his pages unscathed; that is, either they must be travelers from some distant past or must adapt with the harsh realities of modern times. Adding to this is his use of language, where many of his traditional heroes, even from the ranks of the *aswangs*, bear a significant British accent as though to give a feeling of distance. This distancing of

character rendering creates the atmosphere of intrigue and mystery as to the true nature of these traditional heroes, making them above the level of the modern and very much ordinary ones. However, this distancing through language contributes to the appearance of these heroes as stilted and artificial. One example of this is from Lam-ang's encounter with the disenfranchised group of Igorots while on his search for a magical vessel that contained the trapped *aswangs*. Below is an account of his greeting to them:

"Yes, the legend is true for I am he, brother of your ancestors sent by the gods on an important mission" (Arre, 2005, p. 33).

His contemporary heroes, however, are left with the dilemma of finding self-recognition and fulfillment. Unsatisfied with the current trends, Arre's contemporary hero becomes a romantic hero, contending his personal goals and desires against the values of present society. He is disillusioned knowing that to succumb to norm is difficult and unacceptable. Despite these appropriations of his heroes, they still retain marks of the Filipino character — hopeful and defiant.

To create a world filled with superheroes, Arre does not make up characters that resemble American mainstream comic book heroes. Instead, he researches and taps into the rich world of Philippine folklore, epics, and lower mythology and draws from them the heroes for an adventure that literally tries to "reclaim the past." Bantugan, Lam-ang, and Kubin are made alive though their origins have been altered in one way or another. Maria Makiling became a pubescent girl who sells sampaguita on the street, and heroes rely little on their powerful talismans, the *agimat*. Despite their individualistic ideals, they still have a need

to seek help from their companions, whether for physical aid or emotional support.

Typically, the Filipino hero is an underdog, unrecognized in the beginning. For some, he is the champion of the masses as he had risen from his ranks: from the cop-killer turned hero Fernando Asedillo, to the average Filipino named Allan. But in its overall aspect, in lieu of the study of postwar novels by Rosario Ramos (1974), because of the Filipino hero's imbalanced and sometimes-biased view on tradition and modernity, he is quite often disheartened.

Overall, the Filipino heroes in Arnold Arre's graphic novels embody the following attributes:

1. The hero is still a Filipino through his sense of responsibility and sense of affiliation although Arre's works are slightly conditioned by Western conventions. For the heroes to be identified as Filipinos, they are illustrated with features that depict peculiar Filipino traits and qualities.
2. His heroes also bear ethno-epic qualities, yet his story follows the monomyth.
3. His heroes are often problematic of their own identity; they often face the challenge of finding who they truly are in order to fully recognize who THEY are.

With this analysis, I found that the characteristics of Arre's heroes are somewhat symptomatic of today's Filipinos, who most often look for a definitive identity in the midst of the confusing life of modernity. Thus, further studies can be done to verify this idea.

## The Hero They Are

It is, thus, clear that as civilizations come and go, heroes rebound, only to transform in different guises. Their adventures often take the same turn, along with that of how they are depicted and rendered as characters. The only difference is mainly in their worldview in which the Western heroes aim merely for self-serving glory, whereas the Filipino hero simply aims for the welfare of his fellowmen. But the Filipino hero, so affected by colonization, lost himself in the process, forcing him to search for his true identity, his sense of purpose. In a country where everyone no longer cares for identity, the Filipino hero still persists to move on in his quest, alone yet hopeful for what the future may bring.

In the case of the traditional heroes depicted by Arnold Arre, they became subjected to the changes brought about by their environments, affecting them both in appearance and in character. That for no matter how pure his intentions are to reintroduce Philippine myths to a medium preceded only by the closure of the *komiks* industry, the traditional heroes appear either distorted or out of place. As already mentioned, this is more because of their ineptness to adjust to the times where society sees them only as mere curiosities, detached from what we call “the present.”

Arre’s modern heroes fair no better as they become alienated in their own country. It is either they feel revolted by their surroundings, cynical about their life, or feel left out by the now dimming past.

But for no matter how bad things are for Arre’s Filipino heroes, they act as reminders of who we are and what we must

become. For Arre’s heroes, the only way to regain a sense of identity is to return to one’s roots. In that way, one may finally regain the lost selves that somehow find their way through the pages of a popular comic narrative.

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