

Versification in Tagalog

By TARROSA SUBIDO

TAGALOGS are pleased to repeat to various audiences the statement that they are brought up and thrive on poetic fare; that their temperament, character, and personality are molded by cradle songs and nursery rhymes in early childhood, by riddles and conundrums and "teasers" later, by rhymed homilies as long as under parental care, and then by the *duplo*, the *karagatan*, and the *awit* in society with fellow-adults, not to speak of the numberless occasional songs of the adult world. But, except for a few poets, the Tagalogs do not add that they have a system of versification, a system determined—or pre-determined—by the Tagalog language, an art created by the genius of their race, and withal deriving vitality from aesthetic resources universally known.

Our foremost Filipinologist, Dr. Jose Rizal, master of the art and craft of both Tagalog and Spanish poetry, is authority for the statement that: "*en vano los españoles han procurado introducir la construccion de sus versos. El pueblo no lo ha adoptado.*" This, in 1887; and if we compare his *Arte Metrica Tagala* with Bencuchillo's *Arte Poetico Tagalo*, written almost two centuries previous, we find that the fundamentals of rhyme and rhythm had indeed remained unaffected in spite of the long, uninterrupted contact between Spain and the Philippines.

It is easy to see how poetry, of all the native literary forms, has suffered the least from foreign entanglements. Poetry being the art *par excellence* of language, the Tagalog poet must first have a grasp of the immigrant's language and literature before he can subject his own native poetry to the processes patent in the immigrant's art; or, vice versa the foreign poet must know native lore and speech to a degree where they become malleable to his creative touch, and there must be many scores of such foreign poets, if their influence is to be impressed on native material once and forever. Add to the language barrier, considerations of background, temperament, ideals, and other differences, and you will be finally persuaded that Tagalog poetics could not have come under foreign domination.

Versification in Tagalog takes cognizance of rhyme, rhythm, and stanza as the mechanical aspects of a poem, and of thought and feeling as the motive forces. We shall consider the mechanics of Tagalog poetry, as it is rather in form than in substance that the Tagalog bard distinguishes himself from the rest of the species.

I mention rhyme before rhythm, with good reason: if the stock of Tagalog verse as we have it, preserved were to be analysed, we would discover that all the verses are rhymed, though not all have the fixed rhythm of conscious art. In other words, the initial

drive is toward riming² sounds; it is only when the poetic impulse is sustained, when the poet allows himself time to listen to his pulse-beats, that he distributes the sounds evenly to arrive at the meter of poetry.

For purposes of analytical study, it is convenient to group Tagalog verse into two types: (1) verses which show the initial poetic urge imperfectly realised, which we shall call popular; and (2) verses which fully realise the artistic concepts of rhyme, rhythm, and stanza, which we shall call literary. In the latter type, the verse is usually identified with some known author. The best examples of popular verse are the nursery rhymes, "teasers" (*pannudyo*), riddles (*bugtungan*), and sayings (*kasabihan* or *salawikain*). In the examples here given, note that the verses rhyme but do not scan:

1. *Matulog ko na. bunso*
at ang ina mo' malayo;
at hindi ko masundo,
may putik at may balaha.
2. *Pung pung*
Pungapong
Nakita ko sa kugon
Na gugulung-gulong.

Pung pung, kasili
Ipinanganak sa kabibe.
Ano ang anak? Babae.
3. *Sige ulan*
Pantay huwayan,
Sige bagyo
Pantay kabayo,
Sige hamog
Pantay bahod.
4. *Bata, bata,*
Pantay-lupa,
Kapatid ng palaha.
5. *Gayo gaya*
Puto maya.
Nakapulot ng isang pera,
Ibinili ng bibingka.
6. *Isang bayabas,*
Pi.o ang butas.
7. *Bato na ang tawag ko,*
Bata pa rin ang tawag mo,
Turingan mo kung ano.
8. *Nagtanim ako ng niyog*
Sa tabi ng ilog.
Ang bunga ay kalug-kalog.
9. *Mayraon ba man,*
Iba rin ang arimohanan.

10. *Ang masama sa Iyo,*
Huwag mong gagawin sa kapwa mo.

II

THE Tagalog rhyme scheme includes both perfect and imperfect rhyming. We have perfect rhyming where the verse ends in a vowel or in the glottal sound, since in such a case there is full consonance of the final syllables of a stanza. We have imperfect rhyming where the verse ends in a consonant sound since then there is only vowel but not consonant correspondence between the final syllables of a stanza. There are two sets of imperfect rhymes, to wit:

First set			Second set		
ab	ib	ob	am	im	om
ap	ip	op	an	in	on
ad	id	od	ang	ing	ong
at	it	ot	al	il	ol
ag	ig	og	aw	im	oy
ah	ih	oh	ay		
as	is	os			

An accented syllable may rhyme with an unaccented syllable. Syllables with the vowel *e* or *u* rhyme with the *i* and *o* group, respectively. Note how the Tagalogs seem to have an intuitive knowledge of sound affinities, the terminal sounds in their rhyme scheme conforming to the aggrupation of sounds in the science of phonetics.

Internal rhyme is not allowed in Tagalog poems; that is to say, there must be no repetition or correspondence of final sounds between the divisions or "feet" of a line.

III

RHYTHM in Tagalog poetry arises from the regular recurrence of sound and non-sound, unlike in English where it is produced by regular recurrence of stress and non-stress. The non-sound or caesura need not, however, be any more marked than is the accent in English verse: it is made obvious only in scansion.

In popular verse, the line does not scan; that is to say, the caesura within each line is indeterminate; moreover, the lines within a stanza may not always be uniform in length, varying from 5 to 10 or 12 syllables (see

preceding examples). In literary verse, on the other hand, the caesura is fixed at points 4 or 6 or 8 syllables apart; and the number of syllables and caesuras is consistent throughout the stanza. In the 12-syllable line, we may have three feet of 4 syllables each, or two feet of 6 syllables each; in the 16-syllable line, four feet of 4 syllables each, or two feet of 8 syllables each; in the 18-syllable line, three feet of 6 syllables each (examples are given further below).

There is also the 8-syllable line where there is no break until the end of the line, thus *Balagtas'*

*ang balet, hindi ang laman,
iyo palang tintingan*

and the 10-syllable line (e. g. the Tagalog version of the Passion of Christ) where the break is likewise terminal. These metrical units, however, seem to be the least preferred today. The 12-syllable line, with the caesura in the very middle, is the favourite meter.

IV

STANZAIC FORMS. We notice that popular verse runs commonly to two or three lines, while the favourite literary form is the 4 or 5 line stanza. Whatever the number of lines, all the lines in one stanza must follow a single rhyme scheme, the next stanza differing in rhyme; otherwise, the poet lays himself open to the charge of poverty or laziness, or ignorance of his art.

Examples of literary verse follow. Note the rhyme scheme of each stanza, the absence of internal rhyme, the syllable-count and caesural placement in each line (as indicated in parentheses by the figures and dashes, respectively), and the number of lines to the stanza:

1. From *Lope K. Santos' Ang Buhay* (4-4-4):

*Mainggitin. Maparangya. Mapalala.
Maramdami't hung gasinong di-mabiro.
Alanganin: tla' lantad, tla' tago.
Nahikitang kumikilos, di-mahipo.*

2. From *Balagtas' Florante at Laura* (6-6):

*Ang taong magaw' sa ligaya't aliw,
Mahina ang puso't lubhang maramda-
min;
Inaakala pa lamang ang hilahil
Na daratna'y di na matutuhang bathin.
Para nang halatang lumahi sa tubig,
Daho'y nalalanta munting di madiig.
Ihinaluwoy ang sandaling init,
Gayon din ang pusong sa tuwa'y naniig.
Munting kahirapa'y maramlakhing dala,
Dibdib palibhasa'y di gawing magbata.
Ay bago sa mundo'y balang kisap-mata,
Ang tao'y mayroong sukot ipagdusa.*

3. From J. C. Balmaseda's translation of Rizal's *Ultimo Adios* (6-6-6):

*Bayang sa init ng araw ang ulan ay
pumailanlang
at saka magbalik sa langit na lapis ng
paos kong sigaw,
bayaang ang aking, maagang pagtugpa'y
ifangis ng ilan,
at hung dapit-hapon mo) mangisa-ngi-
sang mag-uhol ng dasal,
idalangin mo rin, bayan ko, ang aking
panggapahingalay;
Idalangin mo rin yaong nangabulid sa
parang ng digma,
ang mga nagtiis ng di gagaanong mga
pagkadusta,
ang mga ulila, bala at bilanggang pit
at salanta;
idalangin mo rin ang kapalaran mong
ni pagla) a'y wala.*

4. From *Inigo Ed Regalado's Bakit Ako Lumuluha* (8-8):

*Kung ang ibong nag-iso sa ulilang ha-
lamanan
sa paghuni'y tinutugon ng ibon ding
uulang malay,
sa hibik ng isang pusong lumuluha sa
suyuan,
sabiin mo, mutyang gilwi: ang tutuga'y
sino namun?
Itong lupa kung kaya lang punong-puno
ng bi)aya
ay pagka't may isang langit no lagi
nang nagpapala.
Ako'y lupa, ihaw'y langit, bakit ako
lumuluha?
Sumagot ka, mutyang gilwi: hindi ka
ba naawa?*

Of the mechanics of versification—rhyme, meter, and stanza—we find that the stanza has least resisted modern intrusions. Where the old stanza ran ordinarily to a fixed number of equal lines, observing but one rhyme-scheme, the new stanza may have any number of lines, of varying lengths and rhymes, arranged in new pat-

terns. In a spirit of experimentation, the modern Tagalog poet may even surprise us with a sequence of Petrarchan sonnets or Pindâric odes!

Outside of rhyme and metrics, the versifier need not strain after special poetic effects, like iteration or tone effects. Alliteration and iteration are not just "devices" in Tagalog verse: they are natural speech phenomena, inevitable even in prose. The Tagalog language is agglutinative: prefixation, especially in balanced construction, results in spontaneous alliterative diction; and reduplication, a very common derivational process, creates delightful iterative effects.

As to tone effects, we note in our studies of the aesthetics of sound, a universal recognition of the purity of vowels and the fluidity of consonants as qualities that make up for beauty of tone. Now, vowels in Tagalog are pure, with the open *a* outnumbering all the other vowels. As to consonants, the Tagalog vocabulary is rich in liquids: the common affixes *al*, *ali*, *bali*, *halu*, *malu*, *pala*, *salu*, *tala*, etc., etc., swell their number, not to mention in-

ter-vocalic *d*'s which become *r*'s. The characteristic nasalisation of labials and dentals after certain prefixes results, also, in a wealth of *m*'s and *n*'s; add to this the common prefixes *mar*, *nang*, *pang*, *sang*, and the like, the indispensable suffixes *an* and *in*, and the inescapable ligature *ng*; and you will readily see how naturally poetic in tone the language is.

Until recently, free verse was not appreciated as a distinct form of poetry. Nothing was mentioned of it, both in Bencuchillo's and Rizal's study of Tagalog versification. At any rate, it can be safely left aside since the composition of *vers libre* involves no set rules which could be entered into this present study of metrical art in Tagalog.

It would be a fine thing if Filipinos would make a careful analysis of the poetry of the Ilokos, Visayas, Bikol, and other regions to which they respectively belong; a comparative study of their several analyses might reveal one single body of poetics common to the entire Filipino race.—#



"The Real Rizal Way"—

TRIBUNE NEWS WEEKLY EDITORIAL: The symbol that was Rizal would be alive and vital to us today had we known to think more of our fellow-countrymen's welfare and of our dear nation over and above all personal considerations.

It is regrettable that the contradictions of our life in the past regime—the easy acceptance of superficial success in an atmosphere of material conveniences against the deep lessons of a martyr's life insisting upon personal sacrifice as the only road to national glory—confused most of us and leaves many of us still uncertain and undecided. Our convictions are passionless if not dead. We can make obeisances and contribute money for the erection of a shrine, but our lives reflect little of the mechanical gestures and vapid utterances that we make. Rizal is so remote from us, still.—#