

So they have!

Folk Literature

By E. Arsenio Manuel

THE CULTURE, experiences and sentiments of a people usually find expression in their literature—whether oral or written. In a preliterate society this expression attains ideal soil for growth in its myths and legends, folk tales, rituals, poetry, and songs. Advanced or civilized peoples still make folk literature, but this is not so rich nor so imaginative; they are, however, the makers of written literature in which they excel. Each period and epoch in the cultural history of a people therefore produces the corresponding type-mirror for the ample reflection of their culture. For instance, Tagalog is comparatively poor in its folk literature but rich in its written literature. Some mountain peoples of Northern Luzon, on the other hand, have a wealth of folk literature that cannot be matched by the combined richness of that of Luzon lowlanders, although they do not have any developed written literature.

This may be explained by the fact that the mountain peoples were really never vanquished by the Spanish *conquistadores*. They were thus able to preserve their primitive culture. The lowlanders, on the other hand, easily submitted, not bloodlessly to be sure, to the might of the conquerors, or to the more softening influence of the cross. Their culture, therefore, became adulterated; and although on the whole it got enriched, some of its ancient manifestations were totally wiped out. Sometimes, though, a people shows a strong disinclination to give up what is native in the face of disorganizing foreign forces, and when this happens, the event serves as an index of the virility of the group.

The unwritten literature of the Filipinos is the result of the effort of the masses at oral expression, whether conscious or unconscious. It is traditional and for that reason has age; it is rooted in antiquity. Behind it are thousands of years of development. Customs

and superstitions gave it impetus; it developed into myths and legends, folk tales and stories; then into folk songs and ballads, later flowering into narrative poems and epics.

In a mythological period the people felt veritable truths in their myths. With retelling, these myths gained audience as society grew and lent permanence to this folk type until they became a part of the culture of the people. The creation of the earth and sky, of the first man and woman, of fire and water and of other mysterious forces of nature—these were easily the subjects of fear and veneration and consequently of popular thought and belief.

AMONG THE ancient Bisayans of Negros Island it was believed that the land was caused by Manaul, the king-bird of the air, who, to put a stop to the war between the sea and the sky, lifted rocks up in the air and cast them down to become the first lands. This fabulous bird was the same one who pecked at the bamboo that yielded the first man and woman. Iloko farmers appear to have preserved a trace of the same folk-motif of the first man and woman coming out of a bamboo cast into the sea by Angngalo, a cyclopean giant to whom is ascribed creative acts of supernatural character. He juggled with mountains—at times lifting them bodily to other places. He dug



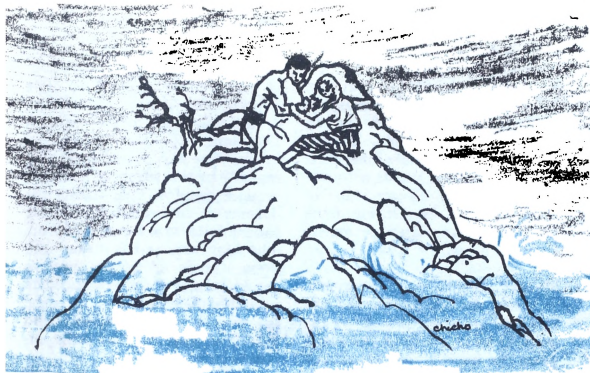
holes with his fingers to make great valleys, urinating into them afterwards to convert them into bodies of water. Angngalo's g-string could dry the waters of the sea and his principle could be held firm across the Abra river gap for people to use as a bridge. This legendary figure finds its counterpart in the Ibaloy myth of a giant who used to extend his arms across the swollen rivers. More significant still is the Atayal tale from Formosa of a man sixty fathoms tall "whose phallus was of a size large enough (on which) to cross a river." The Iloko version ties up with the Formosan Atayal.

Among the Manobos of Mindanao, the creation of the world is attributed to the first great Manobo, Makalidung, who set it on posts. Close to the central pillar he had his abode in company with a python; he shook the posts whenever he was angered, thereby causing earthquakes. This giant has his counterpart in Talia-kud, the Tagbanwa chief deity of a seven-floor underworld, and in an Ifugao Atlas of the underworld known as Tinukud.

The belief in an Atlas, or god who supports the earth world, seems to be widespread in the Philippines, and the name applied to this supernatural deity is nearly always derived from the same stem *tukud* (*tukud*, *tokod*—meaning post or support) which is common in many Philippine languages.

Folk imagination finds an interesting expression in the story of how the sky came to be. The Bagobo version attributes the sky's present position to a woman pounding rice. She accidentally hit it with her pestle, thus raising it where it is now. This tale is widespread in Mindanao—the Tiruray modifying it a little. Here the pounder is on top of a mound. The Moro version has it that once upon a time an average person would bump his head against the sky if he stood erect. The same is found among the Subanons and the Bilaans, except that in this last, the rice-pounder suspends her grandchild in a *patadyong* against the low sky. A Hiligaynon variant is more picturesque, for here a war-dancer hit the sky with his spear. A similarly interesting version is the Iloko story. Here, a tired and hungry husband comes from work and finds his wife pounding rice. Taking hold of another pestle he starts helping his wife pounding rice and in his haste he hits not only the sky but also the comb, earrings, and necklace which his wife had stuck there. The comb became the moon, the precious stones, the stars.

A FLOOD MYTH that is common among the mountain peoples of Northern Luzon center around the story of a brother and a sister who, after the flood, were the only ones who survived. They became the ancestors of the Igorots. This



is somewhat enlarged in the Bon-tok version where the sons of Lumawig, the God-hero, inundated the world to raise mountains to enable them to catch pigs and deer. In the Ifugao story, which is greatly expanded, Wigan's son and daughter marry to give birth to children who populated the Ifugao world. It is among the Ifugaos that myth recitation has reached a high point of development, becoming indeed part of every Ifugao ritual.

Among the Tirurays of Mindanao, the first man was created by Sualla who touched into life one of the eight *Khnemontao* wood-carvings in the place of the sun, and from one of his ribs was created the first woman. His first child died, but out of him came immeasurable benefits: from the

teeth of Mentalalan, the child, sprouted the first corn, from his navel grew the first rice, and from his hands the first banana plants. But Sualla's sister was a devilish sort—Satan's female counterpart—and, envious of her brother's creations, she threw down her comb which became the first pig which destroyed the banana plants; she spat her buyo from her high abode in Bonggo to turn it into infesting rats to eat the rice and corn.

Myths in their genuine form are prose narrations. But the Ifugao myths used in their rituals are metrical—which perhaps indicates a more developed form. Ballad recitations became a medium of emotional expression of the daily life and experience of the people, and as they already prob-

ably had developed rhythms in their rituals, it was now an easy matter to contain their stories in ballads. There is little reason to suppose that the growth was so, nevertheless this might be surmised if one took into consideration the idea that rituals are probably as old as subjects of folk literature came in answer to the needs of a more sophisticated society.

THAT PRELITERATE societies could develop the ballad form into folk art seems to point to the possibilities of crowd expression if given the impetus and the chance for growth under auspicious conditions. Consider, for instance, this excerpt from a Bontok ballad both from the elemental feeling it arouses and the pagan energy achieved through simplicity of narration:

there are, they say, two
cousins:
let us fetch wood;
then, they say, they go to
fetch wood,
then, that younger brother
goes, they say,
then the girls make much
noise weaving;
why! I shall sit down here,
as here I have found girls,
says the younger brother,
they say;
* * *

I shall masticate for the child;
the older brother says:
I won't allow you to masticate
for my child;

then the younger brother
weeps,
then he says:
alas! my wife,
she will be married to another
one.

The above is a representative example of the advanced development of this folk type among our mountain peoples. Most Tagalog ballads have degenerated into comic and tragico-comic beats and themes. Such pre-Spanish songs as the household *diona* and *talindao* have been entirely lost. So have the wayside songs *indulanin* and *dulayinin*, and the boat songs *suliranin* and *manigpasin*.

Filipino folk literature finds its highest point of development in its epics. While other ethnic groups in the plains and along the coasts do not possess sustained narratives of epical character, it is not a sure indication that they did not have them once upon a time. Their simple literature gave in to the more sophisticated outside influences which relentlessly gained inroads as time passed. On the other hand where there were all the favorable conditions the literary historian could ask for in Ifugao environment that assured the flowering of folk literature in that mountain region. Here, shut off by mountain fastness from without, with a wonderful rice-terrace civilization that furnished a steady supply of victuals for the body, the Ifugao had all the time and leisure to develop a rich folk literature.

In no other instance has folklore become so neatly and beautifully intertwined with a people's customs and beliefs as among the Ifugaos. Every phase of the life cycle is studded with countless ceremonies to gain the favor of the gods; or with sorceries and religious rites designed to overcome an enemy in battle. The Ifugaos have more than a thousand and five hundred deities whom they believe have to be propitiated. From rituals it is but an easy step to folk literature.

Let us pick up the threads of customs and lore brocaded into the rich tapestry of the folk literature of the first social class of the Ifugao society, the *kadangyan* class. Particularly let us see this group in its marriage celebration to observe the workings of the myth, epic, and song. Courtship is initiated by an emissary of the boy with an oral recitation of the family history, including heroic exploits, of his ancestors. This usually includes an enumeration of the assets and properties of the boy's family to the satisfaction of the girl's party. If no hitch develops, the boy starts working for the girl's parents until he comes of age. Preparations for the marriage are then made.

The marriage ceremony is elaborate with the rites taking almost the whole day, for the gods must be propitiated with prayers and the recitations of the deeds of legendary heroes—the idea being to

insure, by analogy or sympathetic magic, the happiness and prosperity of the couple. Neither are bad omens left alone, for there follows a series of appeasements and sacrifices. Certain religious ceremonies, the *uyauy* for instance, must be carried out before the wedding festival is finally performed.

EVERY NIGHT for fifteen to thirty days, the whole neighborhood celebrates in music, dance and song, the last five days being the climax of the *uyauy*. On the first night of the last five days which is called the *holyat*, a select group sings the *Alim*, one of the epics of the Ifugao-people. It is the story of a marriage that failed due to the ignorance of the man. Meanwhile ricewine flows freely. The singing of this epic may take two days, after which the priests continue it with the *Baltong* and then the *Guway* which is sung under the house. This ends the *uyauy*. But not the singing. Usually two men, hand in hand, stand on the threshold of the new home and sing the *Danew* which is a blessing song. In other parts of the house and in the yard, the old men join the young in dancing, stopping only to tell more legendary stories of *gopas*.

The groom is finally crowned with the bird *kalaw*'s head, complete with accessories and trappings. The bride, in turn, is given her gifts of jewelry and beads. The couple then begins a series



of visits—to relatives in other villages, where singing and dancing likewise take place. In the morning a priest recites the *hangal*, an apology to the gods of animals. It is a sort of poem recited before animals are butchered. Another day of feasting follows and finally the couple is blessed by the priest in a ritual called *haligonup*. This terminates the *uyauy* festival.

But not the various other rituals which must be observed! Following the harvest season next to the marriage celebration, the villagers from the man's place go to the girl's farm to harvest the crop, and vice versa. This is the height of thanksgiving. Here the *Hudhud* is sung. It is another epic, closer to the people than the *Alim*. In the granary where the harvest is brought, the old folks sing the *bonbonwe*, a question and answer type of song on kindred subjects. The younger men and women exchange love songs called *liwliwa*, a prelude to courtship. Now, at last, the couple are ready to re-

ceive the final blessing and benediction—the *hongga*—and after almost a year of colorful festival and merrymaking, the ritual, the dance, and the song are over.

THE COLOR and wealth of these festivals can hardly be duplicated anywhere, except perhaps in Mindanao among the Maranao Moros. The long narrative poems of this people are just as rooted in the tradition of the people as those of the tribes of Northern Luzon. The *darangans*, as these narrative poems are called in Maranao, are epical both in conception and structure. Of these, however, only one seems to have been fully recorded. This is the *Bantugan*, a fragmentary translation of which exists in English. This piece requires three nights of singing to finish. It has been described as possessing such sustained beauty and pathos that women have been known to weep hearing it sung.

Among the Sulu Moros, an epic of lyrical quality, the *Parang Sabir*, is well known. This epic, however, has never been written down completely, and only a fragment in an inadequate English translation is available. The Tagbanwas of Palawan also possess a rich though untapped popular literature, and among their long narrative poems which they call *dagoy* and *sudsud*, there are pieces of epic range.

Every ethnic group in the Philippines is the possessor of a rich

lore and so long as these groups do not become absorbed by stronger peoples, their folk creations are likely to be retold and recited and sung for all time. The Manobos of Southern Mindanao, for instance, had been pushed time and again by migrating peoples from without until they became bottled up far in the hinterland where they have lived and preserved their lore to a surprising degree. One long poem of epic breath, the *Tatuaang*, is reported from this area.

On the other hand, the Bikols used to have an epic which has been partially lost. Among the Ibaloy people bearing the brunt of outside contact, one or two old native priests still remember their great folk traditions, among which two related epics—the *Kabuniyan* and the *Bendian*—still survive. It is feared that unless these are actually written down, these folk stories will be lost to us. The Iloko narrative poem, *Lam-ang*, has certain epic qualities and pre-Spanish elements which would date it among the earliest narratives of length in existence.

It seems unbelievable that the metrical romances of Europe, which started to fall out of public favor after the Spanish Cervantes had ridiculed and parodied them in his *Don Quixote*, would find fertile ground in the Philippines where the institution of knight-errantry was as totally strange as snowfall. But the seed was somehow disseminated; it sprouted and

grew, and finally flowered in Francisco Baltazar's *Florante at Laura* towards the second third of the nineteenth century.

METRICAL romances of Medieval Europe were the product of folk creation and legitimately belong to folk literature. In Tagalog a considerable number of *awits* and *corridos* were anonymous, though some authors were audacious enough to put their names on the title pages. The metrical romances became very widely popular and very soon every class had its share of the delightful literary fare. Even the farmer, home from his labor, found rest reading this cheap literary repast. Indeed everybody found in the metrical romances endless entertainment, drawing from them quotations to prove a point, reciting them, singing them, and even dancing to their musical rendition.

In Tagalog alone there used to be about two hundred *awits* and *corridos*. In Iloko, Pampangan,



and in other Philippine languages, the count is probably a little less. But the Iloko has preserved a native piece which shows very little traces of Spanish influence. This is the *Lam-ang*. Compared with other metrical romances in the Philippines the *Lam-ang* has no definite meter or stanzaic pattern—a fact which certainly points out to its more native origin. It is a thousand-line epic in *monorima*. This may indicate further that the native versifiers did not show much concern for the meter or regular syllabic counting, and yet their folk literature was no less richer for the lack.

There is a very interesting folk development of the *awit* closely associated with the song, and this is the dance. This element appears to be the contribution of the southern Tagalog to the development of the *awit*. In Quezon province, the dance is an inseparable feature of the *awit*. The *awit* celebration may indeed start without a dance, but it eventually leads to the dance. In a *tapatan*, for instance, the performers start in front of the house of the celebrant reciting verses. The moment they succeed in ascending the stairs, the interest begins to center on the clever maneuvering of the incoming participants to make those already in the house sway to the rhythm of the song. As soon as they have succeeded in doing this, they are welcomed into the sala and the affair becomes one

continuous singing and dancing.

The whole metrical romance may be sung and danced in this way for hours on end. The participants, having committed whole romances to memory, pit their talents one against the other. One dancer sings a stanza or two and another takes it up and, alternately picking the narrative, finishes the song. A more trying way was for one to pick out one stanza at random from any text and the other continue with the next following stanza. A variation was for one to recite any enigmatic passage for the other contestant to answer or continue. There was always a fresh supply of dancers and participants to replenish those whose voices became hoarse. Thus the *awitan* became a vociferous display and contest of folk dance, song, poetry, humor, and much wit.

IT IS DIFFICULT to ascertain how folk poetry came to be. It could have originated from some deep emotional feeling in man. Such a stimulation might be in the form of grief over the loss of a beloved. Thus, the Iloko *dung-aw* is not merely a lament similar to the Tagalog *taghoy* or *panambitan*, but it is emotionally charged with poetry in the truest sense of the word. The *dung-aw* is a stylized lamentation which recites the story of the deceased, his personal history, his achievements, and sometimes an apology for his

failures and misconduct. Any attempt to record the dung-aw is beset with difficulties. An intruder will invariably produce self-consciousness on the part of the highly-aroused poet, a disturbance such as this often affecting the spontaneity of the sentiment and the flow of ideas of the grief-stricken mourner. For this reason we are not aware of any really good text in Iloko taken down freshly and directly from the fullness of the poet's grief.

Among the Igorots of eastern Benguet, the same custom exists. One such lamentation was recorded and translated into English. According to the account written for us by Father Alphonse Claerhoudt, as soon as the man had breathed his last, the women began pounding rice below the house, picking up the rhythm of his life with the sound of pounding pestles. Meanwhile near the body of the dead man lay the wife. She did not look at her husband's face nor at his body. She sobbed and gave way to her sorrow and let flow all the tears in the heart.

Oh pity me, oh you my brother!

Oh pity me, oh you my husband!

You died, alas, oh you my brother!

You died, alas, oh you my husband!

What's left to me, and what remains there?

To me, a poor and useless creature?

They all, yes all, they will forget me

Who was to you just like a baby!

No never can I stop my weeping

Forever would I cry, forever, forever,

If crying made me not ashamed!

And when I think now and remember

That nothing, nothing to console ye

I can present to you my husband,

No, never can I stop my weeping

Forever would I cry, forever. It is true, our work was

always heavy, And 'twas perhaps our sorry fate

In poverty to work and live! We did our best and slaved together

To raise some pigs and feed some cattle.

But we had none of ours, you know it,

No we had none to us belonging!

Oh brother, patience, oh weep not, brother,

Because your sister gives you nothing

Of all we work'd for once together.

I turn'd the kettle on the ashes,

As signal, yes, a sorry signal,
Of poverty we always lived in!
Alas, our hope is gone forever,
With me remains not e'en
the slightest!

No, never can I stop my
weeping,
Forever, would I cry, forever
If crying made me not
ashamed!

ATENTION might be called to several things in this connection: the elementary passion aroused in the bosom of a bereaved one; the innate response manifested in the natural flow of feeling, the outburst coming from the lips of an individual without training; and the outward manifestation resulting in poetry and song at the same time. The student of the beginnings of literature will find no better example of spontaneous poetry as in this exceptional instance where grief bleeds the heart and the heart bursts into genuine poetry.

Some authors believe that in folk sayings may be found the early beginnings of folk poetry. Folk sayings are short but they carry the load of a thought. Consider for instance the Tagalog saying which runs like this:

*Ang pakikisindi
Daan ng pakikibangi.*

In prosaic terms this simply means that acquaintance might breed close friendship—and the Filipino husband or wife does not like this. The rendition is too naive and

does not carry the rich imagery implied in the original.

The folks have other outlets for dressing up their ideas in figurative speech. This may be seen in their riddles. Whereas a Bikol would disguise the mushroom like this:

*Harong co sa buclod saro
an tokod,*

My house on the hill has
but a single post—

his Tagalog brother would more fully describe it thus by juxtaposition—

*May binti, walang hita;
May tuktok, walang mukha.*
He has a calf but no thigh;
He has a head but no face.

Another example might be given to show the simplicity of folk description. Whereas the Igorot would regard the three heads of stone as "houses facing each other that cannot be burned," the Bikol would prefer to represent them as "three brothers who have but one name," and the Tagalog would say it in this wise—

*Tatlong magkakapatid,
Sing-iitim and dibdib.*
Three brothers (or sisters)
With equally black breasts.

A naughty boy or girl would just change the "breasts" to "anus" and you have a hot contest in riddles. Children would recall every riddle and pit their memory one against the other in a precocious display of wit and banter. Many never get the correct answers, but in time they learn some

of them, and thus unknowingly they become the effective carriers of folk humor.

The riddle contest may proceed smoothly and the sources may seem inexhaustible until some rogue would pop up with a riddle having a double meaning, such as the following in Tagalog—

Malayo pa ang sibat

Nakanganga na ang sugat.

The spear has hardly been aimed,

But the wound gaps wide open.

Of course this would at once arouse a cry of objection from the virgins, and while they may not actually recoil, this may be the signal for the end of the game. *Bugtungan* or riddle-contests are held during wakes, or even during baptismal parties and other social gatherings.

THERE ARE many other manifestations of folk poetry as the *talinhaga* and *palaisipan* which are forms of the riddle; the *dalit*, *bibit*, and *karagatan* which are ritualistic or religious in nature; and the *duplo* and *sabalan* for popular poets who have mastered the poetic art as only provincial poets can—adhering to classical forms, rigid beats, romantic or commonplace themes, and florid style. These poets are well versed in the

contents of the *corridos* and the *Pasion*, and in the lives of the saints, and are adept in the manipulation of words, in the use of the rejoinder and the repartee. These folk types had their heyday in Tagalog oral literature, but only the *duplo* found acceptance in the popular literature of contemporary Philippines. As now practiced, the *duplo* has developed into the *Balagtasan*—a literary type as remarkable for its exuberance as its ancestor was for its exorcism, a poetical contest between two parties which may have one or more poets each defending a side of some urbane or absurd subject. For this reason it will decline for want of a better muse.

Folk literature is the fruition of the creative mind of the mass of the people in a preliterate society. The people are familiar, as a rule, with their floating literature. This is so because they have a part in its making, in its transmission and preservation. The lore of the group is the property of all; it is a part of the primitive man's culture. Indeed the so-called "uncivilized" man may often be more cultured than his modern brothers, for he is really steeped in the literature of his people and is more familiar with his own native lore.