

The Socio-cultural and Political Undertones in Demetillo's Barter in Panay: An Epic

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines, a treasury of oral folk epics, calls us for opportunities to research epics in transition, documenting and introducing them to wider audiences. Losing of the epic tradition attracts national and international attention and becomes a concern of the state and the educational system. This study is focused on the metahistorical contexts of the epic Barter in Panay by Ricaredo Demetillo (1961) who gathered his materials from Maragtas. The study is anchored to Hornedo's (2004) theory of reality frames in teaching literature. Employing descriptive-qualitative method of research through textual analysis unfolds the value of the text as literary and fictive-historical records. The study aims to answer: How the narrative structure of the epic unveils the political and social practices of the Visayan people? How the characterization reveals the themes of the literary epic? Barter in Panay reflects the "sweetness and light" of the Filipino lifeways-its unique genetic origin and rich traditions. The voice in the epic sketches the community beyond the spatial and projects itself into the future who continues his legacy to the young listening to the tales. The epic contains historically self-aware characters providing integral engines to the Filipino identity. The study benchmarks for literary-anthropological research.

Keywords – Literature, Barter in Panay, literary epic, reality frames of teaching literature, Central Panay, folk literature, descriptive design, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, a treasury of oral folk epics, gives us opportunities to research epics in transition, which implies documenting epics and introducing them to a wider audience. The losing of living epic tradition attracts national and international attention and becomes a concern of the state and the educational system. This leads to the cultural alienation of the students or the younger generations about their culture. It is a vital role of the teacher to fill the gap between the hermeneutical experiences of the students and the cultural values and traditions that their ancestors have practiced in the past which only literature have recorded.

According to Hornedo (2004: 1), the classic principle of teaching effective communication – unity, clarity, simplicity, and veracity – is the same principle applied to teaching any form or materials being taught – and in any case, to literature classes. There is a strong possibility that the teaching of literary material would become disorganized and incomprehensible if the teacher himself is alienated from the literary principles and the text content. This problem arises because literature itself is complicated in form when considered or treated as an art of life. The people's way of life is not clear or does not have specific directions, so as literature if it is not studied and taught accurately by the teacher. Giving value to life as an art itself becomes the focus of literature. The student's interpretation may be dependent in his hermeneutical understanding towards the literary texts he reads if the teacher would religiously apply the basic pedagogical principles of learning.

The study of folklore in the Philippine school curriculum is drowning due to the lack of interest among teachers and students. Addition to this is the influence of the Filipino-westernized forms of literature like novels and short stories in English. This school setting resulted to the Filipino's acculturation despite the efforts of the parents or other carriers of cultural heritage in enculturating the Filipino minds. Florentino H. Hornedo (2000: 51)¹ stated that so vital is folklore to the creation of any national masterpiece. When a writer begins to create a work of art and happens to have been cut off from the mainstream of his race's lore, he is constrained to steal from other cultures or to create his myths so as to contrive the illusion of being rooted in something or being a part of a larger whole. Thus, teachers of literature are responsible to creating phenomenal nationalism

¹ Hornedo, F.H. 2000. Culture and Community in the Philippine Fiesta and Other Celebrations.p.51

awareness of Filipinos' founding parents' heroic values and traditions, not by regressing, but by way of re-establishing a national cultural continuity. These ideals seek to express the metaphors of the past and the metaphors of the mass consciousness that goes within or beyond the classroom setting.

“Needless to say, the condition of Philippine folklore had known happier days. And in the rough tides of colonial history, it was either the victim of cultural suppression or of neglect. Its marginalization froze its progress, and time left it behind. And instead of reaching the 20th century through the mainstream of Filipino urban culture, it vegetated in the mountains and fermented in the basements of the cities.”

(Florentino H. Hornedo: 2000:53)

In 1989, former President Corazon C. Aquino proclaimed the UN Decade of Cultural Development in the Philippines, along with the declaration of Nationalism in Commemoration of the Centennial of Philippine Revolution. It was during that time, PCCA (Presidential Commission for Culture and the Arts) took the lead in drumming up a lively interest in cultural preservation. The proclamation could have been the answer for the warning made by cultural scholars, which mostly composed of the Philippine Folkloric Society that the pace of social and technological modernization and globalization was threatening the very existence and survival of traditional culture and arts. The problem could be true anywhere in the world. The school curricula have not included the traditional arts and the younger generation had neither the motivation nor even the opportunity to receive their ancestral traditions (Hornedo, 1998: 97)².

Culture for the People. The creation of artistic and cultural products shall be promoted and disseminated to the greatest number of our people. The level of consciousness of our people about our cultural values in order to strengthen our culture and instill nationhood on cultural unity shall be raised formally on the educational system and informally through extra-scholastic means, including the use of traditional as well as modern media of communication.

(Sec. 6, Art. I, RA 7356)

² This was discussed by Dr. F. H. Hornedo in his article at UNESCO Intangible of Cultural Heritage, 1998.

Preservation of the Filipino Heritage. It is the duty of every citizen to preserve and conserve the Filipino historical and cultural heritage and resources. The retrieval and conservation of artifacts of Filipino culture and history shall be vigorously pursued.

(Sec. 7, Art. I, RA 7356)

Contributing to the call of Filipino cultural preservation in the school curriculum, as stated in RA 7356 (An Act Creating the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Establishing National Endowment Fund for Culture and the Arts, and for other Purposes) in the Philippine Constitution, it is therefore the desire of the researcher to illuminate the meaning of one of the many epics found in his birthplace – Panay Island Philippines - to the young minds and international audience.

The *Barter in Panay: An Epic*¹, as the subject of this study is claimed by Ricaredo Demetillo (1961) as the first literary epic of the Philippines, for the materials for this work were gathered from the very life of the people and from the checkered history of the Filipinos taken from the *Maragtas*. *Maragtas* is an account containing the semi-historical, semi-legendary records of the Bornean settlement in Panay led by Datu Puti and Datu Sumakwel. In this literary creation, Ricaredo Demetillo used the materials from *Maragtas* with poetic license to suit his own epic purpose².

E. Arsenio Manuel (*Maragtas Symposium*: 44) rejected *Maragtas* as neither a folklore nor a history, for it fails to meet the requirement the authenticity of any folklore material.

In the same manner, F. Landa Jocano (*Maragtas Symposium*: 60-61) declared that:

“Whether or not the Maragtas is acceptable historical document is dependent upon our view about history. If by history we mean actual events as recorded by witnesses, then Maragtas, on the basis of inconsistent internal documentation, has to be rejected as non-historical. But if by history we mean “a branch of learning which deals with written documents about those actions of men which are also social events or result in general conditions, then the Maragtas can be accepted as part of the oral tradition of folk history.”

The analyses of E. Arsenio Manuel and F. Landa Jocano are construed to the declaration of Pedro Alcantara Monteclaro in the preface of his transcription in 1907 as translated by Dr. Manuel Carreon:

“In order that the readers of this Maragtas should not accuse me of having merely composed this book from imagination, I wish to mention the two manuscripts upon which I based my work. One of these was given to me by an eighty-year-old man, who said that it was handed to him by his father, who in turn got it from his father, the old man’s grandfather. This old man was the first teacher in town. The long years through which this manuscript must have passed wore out the paper so much that one had to exercise utmost care in handling it. What made it worse was it was written only in black dye and smeared with the inflammable sap of trees, which burned and made useless parts of the paper. I found in a bamboo tube, where my grandfather used to keep his old papers, the other manuscript. This manuscript however, was not very legible and was so brittle that I could hardly handle it without tearing it to pieces. Having located one manuscript and concluding that there must be available another copy elsewhere, I decided to ask different old men and women in town. My search was not in vain because later I came across in the street the afore-mentioned old man, who even went to extent of giving me the manuscripts dealing with what happened in the town of Miag-ao from the time of its foundation. As a remembrance of the town of Miag-ao, I copied these records in a book on June 12, 1901, but did not publish them then for the reasons I have already stated.”

Monteclaro’s proclamation on the authenticity of his collection, and the analyses contributed by E. Arsenio Manuel and F. Landa Jocano infers that *Maragtas* might gain the respectability of ethnohistory of the Filipinos.

William Henry Scott (1984: 91-103) placed *Maragtas* as both written and oral sources then available, and contains three sorts of subject matter – folks customs still being practiced or remembered by old folks, the description of an idealized political confederation whose existence there are reasonable grounds to doubt and for which there is no evidence, and a legend recorded in 1858 of the migration of Bornean settlers, some of whom are still remembered as folk heroes, pagan deities, or progenitors of part of the present population of Panay. Scott further discussed that there is no reason to doubt that this legend preserves the memory of some actual event, but it is not possible to date the event itself or to decide which of which details are historic facts and which are embellishments of generations of oral transmission.

Maragtas thereof contains ethnographic value and depicts the society as an effective, pragmatic charter of the people’s lifeways. It embodies their worldview,

tells of their origin, contains their ceremonial prayers, provides a “historical” reality for their religious, political, and social norms; defines their kinship structure, express their feelings, and vouchsafes their empirical judgments (Jocano in Maragtas Symposium: 61). Thus, it is the duty of the teacher to uncover the aesthetic value of the text, not merely as a historical record, but also as a reflection of the Filipino’s metahistorical identity through literary approach/ technique. Metahistorical analysis appears to hold much promise in uncovering the aesthetic value of the literary work.

Monteclaro’s *Maragtas* as the source of Demetillo’s *Barter in Panay: An Epic* will not be used in this study as a subject; however, it serves as the primary reference in rereading the epic *Barter in Panay*.

FRAMEWORK

The folk or ethno-epics belongs to the first and longest period, stretching backward to prehistoric time. Lumbera and Lumbera (1982) remark that, owing to the development of our history and consciousness, this period is often overlooked (Lumbera: 1982). The problem leads to the false notion that oral lore went with the precolonial milieu at the dawn of colonialism in 1564. Folklorists however lead us, to the more historically valid view of epic as a living form. The epic singer or poet and his community has to be reconceived as a synchronic *Other* either as carrier of the tradition or a historical witness of his time.

In 1963, E. Arsenio Manuel surveyed the Philippine ethno-epics and classified them into three categories namely pagan, Muslim and Christian. From these three categories, he identified common characteristics of ethno-epics: 1) a narrative of sustained length; 2) based on oral traditions; 3) revolving around supernatural events or heroic ideals; 4) in verse form; 5) either chanted or sung; and 6) with certain seriousness of purpose, embodying or validating the beliefs, customs, ideals, or life-values of the people.

Barter in Panay discloses E. A. Manuel’s theory on the form and structure of Philippine ethno-epics except on the fifth characteristic that it should be chanted or sung. Nonetheless, it embodies or validates the beliefs, customs, ideals, or life-values of the people. The speaker in the stylish lyrical voice narrates the epic either coming from the memory of Datu Sumakwel or every Filipino who is living in the “here” and the “now” of periodization who passes this account as folkloric or historical record to the younger generations.

Demetrio (1986) employs the following criteria of the ethno-epics: 1) the story must contain a body of ancient traditions centering around supernatural or heroic persons or deeds; 2) there must be a living faith in these traditions and their contents; 3) these traditions must be molded into a single poem or group of poems by especially gifted persons; and 4) the poem must be invested with a certain sacred or venerable character, not only for their antiquity, but also for their cosmic, national, and social significance inasmuch as they validate beliefs, ideals, and life-values of the people or race.

He considers form and style as secondary characteristics. These are as follow: 1) the poem must be of certain length; 2) it must be composed in verse form; and 3) it must be either sung or chanted.

Demetrio's characteristics of the ethno-epics present the anthropologist's point of view that pointed E. Arsenio Manuel's theory in secondary position which put emphasis on the performance form. Demetrio's model creates national universal themes as a method of elevating ethno-epics into sacral. Into this view, *Barter in Panay* responds to the primary characteristics of Demetrio's theoretical frame, but fails to meet the secondary characteristics because it is not primarily chanted nor sung, and secondarily, *Barter in Panay: An Epic* is created within a text-based source from *Maragtas*.

Deviating from the Philippine ethno-epic theories of E. A. Manuel and F. Demetrio, and treating *Barter in Panay: An Epic* as a fictive literary creation, this textual analysis is anchored on Florentino H. Hornedo's (2004) theory of reality frames in teaching literature. These include: 1) literature as a theme, 2) literature as an aesthetic creation; 3) literature as script; and 4) literature as the source of history

These approaches in teaching literature fill the gap of periodization between the text and the literature teachers and students to be equally self-conscious on the metafiction and historical content embodied in literature. Using the theory of reality frames in teaching literature through metahistorical approach reveals the literary text as something more or less autonomous experience inside the classroom, and will bring the audience beyond their cerebral perception of history and unfolds the beauty of the text itself. *Barter in Panay: An Epic* as the literary text under study engages the cognitive, conative and emotive aspects of the students *in* and *of* the community in the past through the help of the teacher. F. H. Hornedo's theory of reality frames in teaching literature thus serves us well who are "here" and "now" at the other end of history's periodization. It serves us who are bound to the printed, mass-produced word to the intensely individuated

consciousness with which we approach reality.

However, in this study, the analysis is limited only on theme to unfold the literary themes of the text. The socio-cultural and historical values of the text are uncovered through metahistorical contexts of the epic.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to identify the literary value of the text that contains the records of the Filipinos' culture and traditions. Specifically, it sought to determine: 1) how the narrative structure of the epic unfolds the themes of the text, and 2) how the characterization reveals the political and social practices as the literary-historical contexts of the epic. Answering these questions will enable not only a teacher of literature, but also the students who are exculturated from their ancestors' culture to appreciate and imbibe the customs and traditions of their roots.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive-qualitative method of research is extensively used in this study. The study is focused on the literary-historical contexts of the epic. Hence, the analytical approach (content analysis) is likewise employed. Such approach appears to hold much promise in uncovering the aesthetic and holistic value of the text.

This study utilized the documentary analysis technique, which involves the careful study of all printed materials such as the original transcription of Maragtas by Pedro A. Monteclaro (1957 copyrighted by Juanito A. Monteclaro)³, English translation by Dr. Manuel Carreon, and the Maragtas Symposium (1970). The primary and secondary materials gathered were studied and analyzed systematically to bring out literary-historical contents and were anchored to Hornedo's theory of reality frames in teaching literature. However, the methodology used was not the same as those of the anthropologists that entails rigorous fieldworks. The reading of the text requires the critical analysis considering its socio-cultural,

3 The original transcription of Maragtas was obtained from West Visayas Center for Creative Studies during the informal fieldwork and documentary research done by the researcher last June 17, 2014. The analysis of these printed materials significantly related to the text were presented in the introductory part of this paper as the traced source materials of Ricaredo Demetillo's *Barter in Panay: An Epic*.

historical, and psychological background which provided phenomenological and hermeneutical understanding. Symbolic interaction between the researcher and the text was given emphasis in the textual analysis/interpretation that shed light to the metahistorical questions.

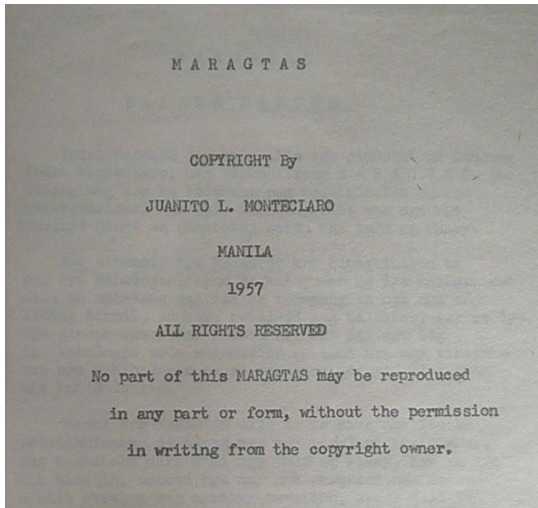


Figure 1. The copyright page of the original transcription of Maragtas

The narrative structure of the epic through the sequence of events was evaluated. Each canto of the literary epic was scrutinized as the basis of revealing the socio-cultural and political practices of the people in Panay Island, and had reflected the Filipino lifeways and culture in general. Each literary element revealed the cultural, political, historical, social, and traditional values system in the actions performed by every character of the epic.

In the course of analysis, passages or quotations were provided and were given interpretations in accordance to its significance to better understanding of the text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Theme of the Epic Barter in Panay

In identifying the theme in any form of literature, the audience must identify the narrative structure and persona of the text that drives them for comprehension.

Literary critics define the persona in any form of art as someone that assumes intellectual and emotional center who speaks to the reader or audience. It is through the speaker whom the author may speak in his own name, whose words and ideas may also be fictive. However, in folk literature, the persona is difficult to be identified due to its historical social origin, what kind of people he was addressing in time of literary composition and what kind of cultural conditions he wants to presuppose in the text. Thus, the persona in folk literature like in the epic of Barter in Panay though under Sumakwel's perspective, is merely undefinable, for the poet stratified him in a position who leaves a lot unsaid, yet expects its readers to grasp what he does not say.

The *Barter in Panay: An Epic* consists of eleven Cantos, each narrates the story or events, underlying the settlement of the Ten Bornean Datus in Panay Island led by Datu Puti and Datu Sumakwel and their meeting with the Aetas who were the inhabitants of the place, led by Marikudo.

The persona in Barter in Panay recounted lyrically and poetically in a stylized oral register of the Borneans' way of life, as well as that of the Aetas. The persona attempts to retain aesthetic autonomy while still returning the text to the *world* of ordinary empirical reality. He projects implicitly and explicitly the people's racial urge and desire for freedom, righteousness, and justice in their division of the land. The persona does these in the epic poetry by greatly modifying the characters' colloquial language and recounting their ways of life.

In nearly all its stanzas, The Barter in Panay is lyric in "we" of every Bornean who narrates his story from his point of view as stated in the first stanza, Canto I of the poem:

<i>Full ten years now is notched on our tree of life</i>	(A)
<i>Since Siruagan Creek we anchored. Hope</i>	(B)
<i>Had keeled our hulls that in this spume-fenced land</i>	(A)
<i>Freedom would germinate like seeds we'd brought</i>	(B)
<i>From far Brunei, where Makatunaw grasped</i>	(A)
<i>A despot's sceptre and a murderer's sword.</i>	(B)
<i>Rather than pour more blood on a gore-soaked soil,</i>	(A)
<i>We fled the coasts of trampling tyranny.</i>	(X)

Each stanza has eight decasyllabic verses or lines with rhyming patterns ABABABAX. The author preferred consonant rhyming pattern rather than assonance. Each stanza is divided into four couplets: the first couplet presents the

topic; the second and third develops the topic; and the last vigorously concludes the stanza in a form of synthesis.

Each Canto of the poem narrates and focuses the story of the characters which are significant in the revelation to the totality of its theme which is the settlement of the Bornean datus together with their wives and their slaves in the Island of Panay (Table 1).

Table 1. The narrative structure of Barter in Panay: An Epic and their contextual themes

Canto	Contexts
I	The Arrival of Bornean Datus in the Island of Panay and the Causes of their Departure from Borneo
II	Kapinangan's Feeling of Incompleteness
III	The Council of the Datus and the Timauas
IV	The Datus' Argument in claiming the land from the Aetas
V	Datu Puti's Turning-over of Leadership to Sumakwel
VI	Sumakwel and Rishi Lakshman
VII	The Failures and Usurpation of Gurong-gurong
VIII	Polpulan and Girum's Death
IX	The Barter in Panay
X	The Adventures of Marikudo
XI	The Adventures of Datu Puti

In the last part of the epic, there is a sudden change of persona's perspective. It was not Sumakwel anymore who narrates the story, for the story itself is about Sumakwel and Kapinangan:

*Before they left, Chief Marikudo said:
 "Tomorrow, we shall leave the settlement
 And you are free to live there. As for us,
 We go to hunt among the hills and find
 A new place where to build a settlement."
 Soon all the beach was quiet. Dusk have come
 And with them, stars which beamed like constant hope.
 That night, most happy dreams glided our sleep.
 (Stanza 81, Canto XI)*

The change of scene and setting changes the persona's perspective who though a part of the story, is narrating using an imaginary camera that captures a significant climactic act – separating itself from the persona of Sumakwel and creating another persona taken from the eyes of the audience. Thus:

*Save that within the hearts of some of us,
Desires grew tangled in a thicketry.
Slim Kapinangan dreamed a finger played
Upon her pearls and then snatched them away
But, strangely with her own consent. When she woke,
Stirred by her dream, she felt Sumakwel's hand
Upon her bosom; she moved out of his reach.
But feeling guilty, she crept to his embrace.
(Stanza 82, Canto XI)*

*Her movement woke Sumakwel. When he found
Her close, he hugged her tightly to his breast.
She yielded to his touch, and, now aroused,
She gave her body to her lord. But in
Her mind, she saw young Gurong-gurong's face;
And so she lay, clasped in Sumakwel's arms,
Until the taut need in her flesh was stilled;
But sleep was fitful and she tossed all night.
(Stanza 83, Canto XI)*

Stanzas 82 and 83 of Canto XI are told by the persona from the voice of a younger generation who probably has listened the tale from his ancestors and retell the story. Switching from the voice of Sumakwel as indicated by “us” (verses 1-2, Stanza 82), the poet transcended his persona from the point of historical perspective to the present world. The poet, who becomes the persona in these parts of the epic, directs the audience (readers and listeners) and links them to the world of empirical reality. In this stylish narration by the poet himself, he implicitly states that the persona has a contemporary critical truism, that realism is really a set of convention constructed between the text and history. The representation of the persona is not real and is not the same as the real itself depicted from the historical characters. The challenge thereof in historiographic metafiction is both any naïve realist concept of representation and any naïve

textualist or formalist assertions of total separation of art from the world. The epic of Barter in Panay thus, simply shows itself as self-consciously art “within the archive” (Foucault, 1977: 92), and that archive is both historical and literary.

B. The Epic of *Barter in Panay* as Source of Historical Records

Every literary work has the specificity of time and space that can be perceived by man’s senses, is wrapped by a history behind it. The specificity of the setting singles out an event that happens in a particular time in the past and may have been constructed by the author from his memory. This makes literature as a metaphor of history. Literature contains or depicts the records of the author’s views, feelings, or critical opinions. Implicitly or explicitly, his literary creation is addressed to an audience who shared with him the same views and sentiments. Thus, the author and the audience in that particular *world* speak or converse and build a common understanding of the literature created by the former. Their shared horizons valued literature as the sacral records of their lives and experiences.

The Socio-cultural Practices

Ricaredo Demetillo wrote *Barter in Panay: An Epic* in 1961 with his epic purpose in describing or recalling the Filipino’s race – specifically the people in Panay Island. The persona of the epic recounts the Bornean settlement in the island and the Aetas’ customs and traditions during the aboriginal period of Philippine history. Particularly, the epic pictures the people’s socio-cultural practices before the Spanish colonization in the country.

- ***Matrimonial Rites***

*That week, we ran the matrimonial race.
 She panted like a deer eager to escape
 Her hunter, but she faltered in my arms
 And, from that day, she never left my home.
 I brought her dowry to my bride, where she
 Was hailed by all as Marikudo’s bride.*
 (Stanza 45, Canto X)

Filipinos have similar aboriginal marriage procedure but differs in ceremonial rites. Among the Aetas, after the conference and agreement of the elders, the bride and the bridegroom were brought to a hill along with their relatives. The bride-elect was made to run a hundred meters ahead of the groom who would run after her. Once he caught her up, they were considered already as married. Then they would go back in hand together to join the festivity and merry-making prepared for them³. At this pace of the epic, Chief Marikudo narrates his adventures and matrimonial rites with his wife Maniwantiwan. Aside from the traditional custom, what the character and the epic implicitly nuance is the participation of the parents/elders in the decision making. Consent and blessing of the parents in the decision made by their children especially in their married life signifies their great respect, for the elders are the epitome of the virtue of prudence which they gained from their life's experiences. To defy the will of the parents results to the failure on the lives of their children.

- ***Myths and Beliefs in Nature***

*We are as you see, mariners. Our homes
Are far away across the scudding sea.
We started our journey when the moon
Was half a golden lemon in the sky,
It ripened to the full, then fell to the dark;
Then grew to half again and ripened full,
Then fell to dark, but now it's half again.
Such is the length of time we journeyed here.*
(Stanza 5, Canto XI)

This was said by Datu Puti when he started narrating how they left Borneo to get rid of Datu Makatunaw's tyranny. They have referred to the nature as indicator of their time of travel.

*The day before our wedding, while the tribe
Was eating, gradually the sky went dark.
Fear seized us all, for never had we seen
So ominous a sight – the dark to swallow sun
At noon. We thought the end of all had come.*
(Stanza 46, Canto X)

Maniwantiwan narrates a part of Marikudo's adventure during the day of their wedding. There was an eclipse, and the day turns to darkness. Since Marikudo does not belong to the Igtalunon community, her other suitors and kinsmen charged Marikudo to be killed; for the God is displeased by their marriage. However, Marikudo proved them wrong; he challenged the monster dragon that swallowed the sun by forcefully throwing his spear to it. After a while, the bird appeared in front of them, and the light suddenly comes again. Everybody believed that Marikudo defeated the monster dragon, and the wedding festivity continued, proclaiming Marikudo as the hero of their tribe.

It is depicted that Filipinos had the strong beliefs in nature and all other creations of God. These mythical beliefs guide them in every act or decision they make. Nature as the representation of God in the reflexivity of Filipinos' religiosity suggests their paganistic nature. However it could also implicitly understood that they have already formed religious customs prior to the coming of Catholicism introduced by the Spaniards.

*And may your gods, the blest anitos, heap
Upon your tribe that gift, prosperity.”*
(Stanza 16, Canto I)

*That's fair enough. One favor we shall ask.
Our people worship Bulalakaw's light;
And for that end, we raised cairns on the peaks
Of mountains. Let us climb those peaks
For worship...*
(Stanza 31, Canto IX)

Evidently, Sumakwel discusses the pact of agreement with Marikudo. The Aetas worship no God, but *anitos* – for no one had come down to tell them who really God is. Every year after their harvest, they offer them foods as offerings to bless them with good health and good harvest⁴. The Borneans on the other hand, worship *Bulalakaw*, the sun-god whom they offer prayers at the peak of the mountain.

The traditional Filipino notion of nature is knowable. They perceive the world as accessible to all their senses – both the visible and the invisible world. Their strong beliefs on both worlds signify the importance of nature in their ways of life – that nature itself supplies their needs from physical to spiritual. Nature's

destruction is man's destruction. The epic of Barter in Panay serves as an avenue to teach the society today the value of nature - the strong spirituality and belief in nature as part of God's creations. These traditional beliefs and myths will bind the Filipinos today to better understand the mythic understanding of science. Acquiring mythical gen means seeing knowledge as a function of life and not merely of consciousness, for consciousness abstracted from its life context alone has often caused mischief in man. Thus, knowledge of traditional and modern beliefs towards nature and God must always of wholeness, for only then a man be whole and care for the whole.

Political Leadership Over the Land

Symbols can be used to communicate with power and authority – both temporal and spiritual. Every culture has developed symbols of power and statuses that accord with its social values, beliefs, and customs. Royalty and office or wealth and possessions are associated with their societal ranks. Traditionally, valuable commodities such as gold have been used to signify wealth and rank. Each item may depend on cultural values. In the epic, gold was offered by the Datu Puti to Marikudo in bartering the Panay Island:

*“Grant to us strangers hospitality:
Water and food for bodies cramped with toil
And, most of all, barter us land for gold;
And may your gods, the blest anitos, heap
Upon your tribe that gift, prosperity.”*
(Stanza 16, Canto I)

In the same manner, Sumakwel had also offered to use his golden *salakot* (hat) and his wife's *batya* (basin) which is made of gold as materials for bartering when he had a talk with Datu Puti.

*“I have a salakot of solid gold,
An ornament melied by cunning smiths
From nuggets, tribute of a distant chief.
My wife, too, has a batya, pure of ore;
She uses it to hold the water of her bath.
These we can give in barter for these coasts.”*
(Stanza 35, Canto V)

The words of Datu Puti and Sumakwel signify that they are willing to barter their greatest possessions and share their leaderships, in exchange for land, which is also worth for gold. However, the decisions they made confine with a conference amongst the other datus who eventually agreed, though they underwent conflicts of ideas. On the other hand, the acceptance of the gold by Marikudo may signify of uplifting and confirming his leadership and governance as the chief among the Aetas. As reported by Paibare:

*“...Now, we have come with news.
Chief Marikudo promises to grant
Us all the coastal plains in exchange for gold!”*
(Stanza 15, Canto IX)

As acceptance of Datu Puti’s code of agreement on commerce and settlement, Marikudo commented:

“Show me the gold you’ll barter for our land.”
(Stanza 32, Canto IX)

Gold, as a traditional symbol of wealth, features in the regalia of monarchy and high office. It is also used to symbolize human achievement shared both by the Aetas and the Borneans on their settling over the Panay Island – that is, the former dwells over the mountains to hunt and the latter would live near the coastal for fishing and on the plains for planting. All these were under the pact of commerce and friendships led by Datu Puti and Chief Marikudo. Thus, the bartering of gold for an abode is equally significant to both tribes.

The Golden Salakot

The salakot is a traditional wide-brimmed native hat made of either rattan or reeds. It used to protect farmers and among others against the rain or the heat of the sun. Historically, it is made of gold used by the high-ranked officials of the neighbouring Asian countries. It symbolizes their power and prestige. However, the salakot is pointed on its top-end. Its pointedness may also represent as a metaphor of the male phallus – used for reproduction. The barter of land with a golden salakot, may iconically be interpreted as Sumakwel together with his tribesmen has the desire to propagate not only with his race, but also the possibility of expanding their identity and populace or community with and

among the Aetas.

*“The Aeta’s eyes were bright with avarice.
[upon seeing the golden salakot]⁵
Sumakwel signaled to some slaves, who came.
Now, when the cloth was lifted, all said, “Ah!”
All abid and oh’d, the Aetas most of all,
For they had never seen such precious thing –
A salakot that gathered in the light
In blazing contours, wondrous in workmanship...”*
(Stanza 32-33, Canto IX)

Without much ado, Chief Marikudo accepted the salakot from Datu Sumakwel:

*“Chief Marikudo grabbed the salakot
And crowned his head⁶ with it – the fit exact.
The gold starling contrast to his skin.”*
(Stanza 34, Canto IX)

The gestures of Marikudo, and of his people symbolize not only their ignorance and amazement towards the materiality of the salakot. They also serve as the gestures of willingness to unite their race and identity to the brown dwellers. The fitting of the salakot to Chief Marikudo’s head means his equal leadership to Sumakwel, who are both expected to lead the planting of seeds towards the propagation of their race.

The Golden Batya

The batya or basin is an open, shallow, usually round container used especially for holding liquids. As a container, it can also be associated with a feminine principle (O’Connor 2007: 16). It is shaped like a woman’s body part – especially that of a womb, where every individual forms and has started his life. In the epic, one of the golds being offered by Datu Sumakwel for bartering the land is his wife’s batya. Kapinangan uses her batya to hold water in her bath. So then, the batya symbolizes herself as a woman and her capability of bearing a child. In the barter, Kapinangan represents every Bornean women who in turn have the possibility of raring their children from the race of the Aetas in time of

their union. As the wife of Datu Sumakwel, she too, is expected to lead in the procreation between the union of her tribe and the Aetas.

*“And one large batya, fit to serve a queen
In her ablutions in a perfumed bath.
(Stanza 33, Canto IX)*

Upon seeing the golden batya, Maniwantiwan, Marikudo’s wife snatched the basin up. For the first time, she has seen her image clearly on the shiny surface of the batya.

*“His wife, not to be outdone, snatched the basin up
And peered upon its shiny surface and exclaimed,
For there she saw her image clearly limned.
She danced, he danced; both clapped their pot-black hands.”
(Stanza 34, Canto IX)*

Seeing her image on the surface of the batya, Maniwantiwan becomes aware of herself as a woman. She and the batya becomes one who has the sufficiency of bearing life for the united race of the Aetas and the Borneans who agreed to share in living and in governing the Panay Island. Turning over the batya to Maniwantiwan means the equal responsibility of the women in leading the procreation and expansion of their tribes. Hence, Kapinangan and Maniwantiwan and their batya are the significations of birth and rebirth of their race which continues and runs in the blood of the Filipinos in the present.

The Barter System

The barter system is an old method of exchange. The system has been used for centuries and long before the invention of money. People exchanged services and goods for other services and goods in return. In the epic, Datu Puti and Sumakwel purchased the Panay Island with a golden salakot, batya, and a necklace. The island has become then a shared property of these tribes. However, it is not only a barter of land and properties, but it could also mean an exchange and share of all the material and non-material cultures practiced by both parties. These include their beliefs on supernaturals, values, leaderships, and justice systems.

*“Let there be commerce between us, and let
There be true friendliness as we have now.
Our ways are different, but we have needs
That you can fill and have you have needs that we,
Out of our bounty, may supply at gain.
My leader Datu Puti, has drawn terms
Which would agree with your best interests
And work for mutual benefits for all.”*
(Stanza 30, Canto IX)

Datu Sumakwel speaks their agreement of the bartered land. However, the voice is a representation of sharing their rich cultures, and customs and traditions known and inherited by the new generations living in the land.

The narration of Datu Sumakwel’s persona tells us of great names and intellectual heroes of our culture and of world’s civilization. The voice of the persona draws us back to the shadows of creating heroes who lead us into life’s kindness. The characterization in the Barter of Panay: An Epic brings us to the center of discovering the extraordinary things in most pieces of historical fiction. Like the Roman’s Aeneid, and Greeks’ Iliad and all other world known epical fiction, the heroes in Barter in Panay: An Epic transmit us the evidences of understanding ourselves, our past, in a very unique and creative way. Barter in Panay: An Epic reshapes and rationalizes the Filipinos’ identity and worldviews, and brings us to the profound interest and link to the contemporary times which this must have been the ultimate value of literatures of the world.

CONCLUSIONS

The study is a response to the urging of Manuel (1985), Demetrio (1986), Lucero (2007), and Hornedo (1997) and other Filipino folklorists for scholars to continue discover and unfold the aesthetic value of Philippine folklore particularly the ethno-epics for its preservation and integration in Philippine school curriculum.

Ricaredo Demetillo’s literary work belongs to the classification of modern epics which are characterized by a long poem, typically derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the history of the nation (Oxford Dictionary).

Barter in Panay: An Epic contains Filipinos' socio-cultural beliefs, values, and traditions revealed by its theme. The persona's poetic voice narrates either coming from the memory of Datu Sumakwel or every Filipino, who lives in the "here" and the "now" of periodization who passes this account as folkloric or historical record to the younger generations.

The characters and the style of narration in the epic reveal the folk historical contexts using the symbolisms of gold, golden salakot, batya, and the barter system. Barter in Panay: An Epic through its symbolisms lays me to imbibe my own unique genetic origin and rich traits and traditions. The voice in Ricaredo Demetillo's literary creation depicts a Panay-anon himself and sketches the community beyond the spatial and projects itself into the future that will continue and preserve his legacy, his race and more so to the young who will listen to the tales. It yields insight about the epic's preservation and function.

As Resil Mojares (2002) states:

"To explore a people's lore is to understand something of the shifting ideological configuration of changing times. A systematic mapping of folklore, informed by a sense of the contingency as well as the interconnectedness of social phenomena, should afford us with a view of material and mental transformations over the long duration."

Barter in Panay contains historically self-aware characters that provide an integral engine to the identity of Panay-anons, and of the Filipinos in general.

Ricaredo Demetillo's epic poetry by treating history in a particular manner is an attempt to humanize the discipline of recapitulation differently. He succeeds in convincing the readers that historical narratives through poetry will not be taken as worlds shut – reputedly finished, done with and over. Rather he shows how those days, people and values of yore have not diffused totally. We are living them in some ways, in some aspect of extension. He also implicitly emphasizes the urgency to know our past and to revise our understanding of it with progress of time. He is a subaltern historian in the real sense that he boards upon the boat of poetry writing to do the job perfectly – one doesn't need to be a master for trying all trades of creative and historical writings. We have come out of the monological times! *Because history is not the only way to interpret one's past, fiction through epic poetry in the hands of Demetillo does that even better.*

Barter in Panay: An Epic as well as its source *Maragtas* indeed shows that intellectual maturity does not only come in substantial historical volumes. In fact,

curiosity for historical knowledge is part and parcel of communal upbringing in most Filipino societies. Our methods of restoring history have been different as Ricaredo Demetillo's epic poetry has depicted. We have the richest oral histories breathing in and among us - that does not mean we lack it. Every culture has like ours, has its own ways of preserving our folkloric tradition which depicts our Filipino identity and worldview – which is the prime aspiration, implicitly treasured in every heart inhabiting this land – the Philippines. The history makes home in hearts here! Our past mingles with our present.

Generally, Philippine folklore contains the symbols of Filipino crushed spirit, and its revival is more than philological – it had a strong racial and political implications, and it illuminates the historic conflicts of man and history.

Barter in Panay: An Epic is viewed as Filipinos' contribution not only in Asian Literature, but also in the canon of World Literature. Like Virgil's Aeneid and Homer's Iliad, Barter in Panay: An epic is a narrative of our nation's rich historical culture and worldviews that happened a long time ago. It is a story of every individual, though time and space separates him in the grassroots of his nation, yet be able to embrace the cultural tradition and shape the structure of the past and reconnect it in the present world he lives in. Barter in Panay: An Epic is a form of "literary epic" that elevates human consciousness through a purposive vehicle in the definition of historical position of the people or nation in the realm of nation's human civilization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The interpretation made in this study will illuminate the Filipino's understanding, particularly the Panay-anons on the historical record of their race, culture and tradition, and identity. Using the findings of this study, they are encouraged to tell and retell the epic to the young generations.

This literary study benchmarks the philosophical contexts of the text which need further explorations and analysis by either a philosophy or literary scholar/researcher.

Rejecting the text as the historical record, and treating it as literary folkloric tradition, the epic contains the cultural beliefs and traditions, political hierarchy and structure which needs validation through literary-anthropological fieldworks.

The Barter in Panay and the analysis of its metahistorical contexts should be included as material in the Philippine school curriculum as a response to the Mother Tongue Based Program of the K to 12 and its preservation.

To absorb closely to the contexts of Barter in Panay: An Epic is to encounter a new vision of the ancient world that lies at the root of human civilization. The literary epic under study contains a man's disremembered tradition that has the power to transform all his views about his culture and his life. Thus, every man, either a scholar or a philosopher must uncover the bewildering reality that lies within and beyond the meaning of the text.

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End Notes

- 1 Barter in Panay won a first-prize award during the Golden Jubilee Literary Contests at the U.P. in 1959.
- 2 The idea presented is taken from the Foreword of Ricaredo Demitillo in his work Barter in Panay.
- 3 The matrimonial rite of the Aetas was discussed in Chapter 1 of Maragtas.
- 4 The beliefs of the Aetas to the anitos were described in the Chapter I of *Maragtas*.
- 5 This line/verse was added to put emphasis to the completeness of thought as seen in Stanza 32, Canto IX of the text.
- 6 In the text, the line is “And crowned his lead with it”, which I suspected as typographical error during its printing. I intended to correct it for contextual comprehension - LABB