

THEMES IN PHILIPPINE FOLK TALES

FRANCISCO R. DEMETRIO, S.J.

The four folk tales presented in this paper come from at least four groups in the Philippines. "Juan Pusong and the Hermit" is a translation of a Bisayan tale obtained from Baylao, barrio of Mambajao, in Camiguin Province. It was collected by Miss Minerva Inguito from old folks of Baylao in the summer of 1967. The second tale "The Story of Juan Pikas" comes from Bukidnon Province. It was obtained from a native informant by Mrs. Carmen Ching Unabia in the summer of 1968. It was originally in Cebuano Bisayan. The third tale or "The Story of Adam and Eve" comes from the Taosug group in Jolo, Sulu. It was collected under the direction of Fr. Gerard Rixhon, OMI, from a native informant between 1961-1970. The story belongs to the class which the Taosug informant Mullung calls *katakata* which he defines as orally transmitted stories "that relate to a distant past of which no testimony is available, except that they are to be believed."¹ The fourth story comes from the north of the Philippines gathered in the last century by Fray Ruperto Alarcon and translated by William Henry Scott.²

The writer is conscious of the inadequacy of his analysis. It is purely literary and psychological. There is very little of sociological analysis, the reason being that no fieldwork has been made to check the tales against story-teller and audience reactions. However, what is worth doing is worth doing even badly. We hope to complement this work with field observation in the not too distant future.

1. JUAN PUSONG AND THE HERMIT

While hunting, Juan came upon an old man who was kneeling beside the trunk of a tree. He inquired from the man what he was doing. But the old man did not answer. He asked again and again, but the old man gave no answer. Juan returned home.

Having reached home, Juan inquired from his mother if such be the way of hermits that they pay no attention to their neighbors. The mother replied that such indeed is the way of hermits. Then Juan assured her that in a short while he would bring the hermit into their home. His mother simply laughed at him.

¹ cf. Gerard Rixhon, *Sulu Studies*, Vol. I (1972), p. 183.

² cf. Fray Ruperto Alarcon, "A Description of the Customs of the Peoples of Kiangnan, Bunhian and Mayoyao, 1857," *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Vol. II, No. 1 (June 1965), pp. 78-100, esp. pp. 82-83.

Juan returned to the mountain, carrying with him a rope and a bag made of *guinit* (rough sackcloth-like wrappings of young coconut shoots). He climbed a tree close to where the hermit was kneeling.

From the tree top, Juan began to sing:

An angel am I	<i>Ako ang manulunda</i>
Come down from the sky	<i>Gikan sa langit sa kahitas-an</i>
Guarding men from the peril	<i>Mianhi ako sa tuman</i>
Of the devil	<i>Aron sa panalipod batok sa dautan.</i>

Three times he sang the self-same song. Then he lowered the *guinit* bag to where the old man was praying. Then he resumed his song:

Hermit, hermit	<i>Ermitanyo, ermitanyo</i>
Get into this bag of <i>guinit</i>	<i>Mosakay ka ning puyong guinit</i>
To heaven I'll bring you in it	<i>Kay dad-on ko ikaw sa langit.</i>

Juan repeated his song over and over again, until the bag reached the old man.

Without delay the hermit stood up and entered the *guinit* bag. The bag closed in upon the hermit as soon as Juan gave it a jerk upwards. He tied the rope to the branch and came down the tree. He cut the rope, threw the bag over his shoulders and started for home at a run.

After he had ran quite a distance, the hermit asked this question: "San Miguel, is heaven still afar off?"

Juan replied: "It's quite near already; hold on a while and we'll be there soon."

When they arrived at his house, Juan said to the old man inside the bag: "At last, here we are in heaven."

Then he opened the bag in the presence of his mother.

To his surprise, his mother began to cry.

The hermit was his father.

THE THEMES

There is real humor in this little droll. There is also a mild exposé of the stupidity of the hermit. Of course, there were no hermits in abundance to make this a really credible instance. In fact, I still have to find real proof of hermits ever existing in the Philippines, even in the past. But the hermit may be taken as a symbol of the so-called "holy" people who spend their day praying, away from their fellows and their families and their commitments. These people are shown to be simpletons in the extreme, with a strong dash of selfishness in their character. But the point of the story does not seem to lie in the criticism of this type of people.

Rather, the thrust of the story is directed first at the mother and finally at Juan. First the mother. When Juan asked her if indeed hermits are known to be heedless of their neighbors, she answered in the affirmative. But when Juan proposed to bring the hermit home, she simply laughed. But as soon as Juan opened the bag in her presence, the woman cried. The hermit was her husband.

Next Juan. Juan was obviously irritated by the uncouthness of the "holy" man who would not even reply to his inquiry. He did intend to get scores evened up with this fellow. As he climbed the tree and sang his song, and when he saw the old man get up to enter the bag, Juan must have laughed secretly, if not openly at the stupidity of the man. And when the hermit inquired from within the bag whether heaven was still far away, and when Juan gave his reassurance that they would soon be there, again he must have been greatly amused at this man's stupidity. And when he opened the bag in front of his mother, his feeling of complete satisfaction, particularly in having fulfilled his boast to his mother, must have been perfect. Yet, how easily this was turned to disappointment and perhaps disgust with himself: the laugh was on himself, too; for this man was his own father. The moral seems to be this: Don't gloat over your having shown others to be stupid. In doing so, you may find out your intimate links with their stupidity.

2. THE STORY OF JUAN PIKAS

Juan Pikas had only one leg, one arm and one eye. Thus he was called Juan Pikas (The One-Sided). As he grew, Juan Pikas was thinking what he should do since even to walk was too difficult for him. So one day, Juan, of his own counsel, decided to go out and search for God in order to find out if he might become a complete man.

So he went on a journey in search of God. He had not been gone for long when he came upon a horse tied to a tether that was very short; yet the horse was stout and well-fed. The horse inquired from Juan where he was going. "To the house of God," Juan replied, "to find out if I may have another body and thus become a whole man."

The horse continued: "Good, Juan, I have a question to ask of God: why is it that I am stout and well-fed when my rope is too short?"

Juan continued his journey. Soon afterwards he came upon another horse with a very long tether, but was very short and hungry-looking. The horse asked Juan where he was bound for. "To God," Juan countered, "in order to inquire if I yet may become a whole man."

The horse in answer said: "Good, I have a question I'd like to ask of God: why is it that my rope is long and yet I am so thin?"

Juan continued on his journey and he came across a man who built a house right at the crossing of the roads. And no man passed by there without this man giving the passer-by food to eat. This man also asked Juan whither he was destined. Juan gave the same response: "I am going to God to ask him if I may get a complete body."

The man was pleased, saying "I have a question for you to ask of God: shall I have salvation in what I do, since, without discrimination, I give food to everyone who comes along?"

Juan proceeded onwards and now came upon a man who had a house built over a very high waterfall. Whoever passed by that place, this man would kill. This man also inquired from Juan where he was going. Juan told him that he was off to visit God's house in order to find out if his body would yet be changed for the better. This pleased the man who said, "I have a message to inquire from God: is there salvation for me in what I do, since I have deprived so many people of their lives?"

Juan moved on and presently came to the territory of God. God now asked Juan what he came for. Juan answered: "I have come in order to see if my body might be changed."

In return God replied: "I now know, Juan, that you have a good mind, because you are of my own making. The reason why you are not yet complete in your body is because I have not yet tested you. But now you will have a complete body and a complete mind."

Then and there Juan recovered a complete body and he was no longer Juan Pikas (or The One-Sided Man). Then Juan relayed to God the question-messages: first from the horse with a short tether: why was he stout and well-fed? God replied: "That horse was possessed of a righteous mind; that is why he is stout. Therefore, he has salvation."

Concerning the second horse with the long rope: "why was he so lean and hungry-looking?" "That horse," God said, "did not possess a good mind, nor was he honest, and therefore, he will have no salvation."

Next Juan mentioned the missive of the man who was very good and invited and fed everyone who came his way: was he to gain salvation? God replied: "Indeed, he will."

Finally he relayed the question of the man who lived over a high waterfall and who killed his fellowmen: "was he to attain salvation?"

"Certainly not," God replied, "for he is a murderer."

Juan returned. He met the wicked man who asked about his message. Juan told him: "I have referred your question to God. But you shall have no salvation because you have deprived many of their lives."

Juan reached the place of the good man who marked how changed Juan was, and inquired what was the answer to his question: and Juan told the man: "You will have salvation because you are a good and honest man."

But the man said: "Indeed, I tried my best to lead an honest life because I did not know whether I may attain salvation or not; but he (i.e., the murderer), since he has killed so many, it is clear he will attain no salvation at all."

But this man because he judged the murderer, reached perdition; on the other hand, the murderer was saved.

Juan continued on his journey until he reached the thin horse which accosted him; "Juan, you are back and your body is now complete; but what about my message?"

Juan replied, "I told God about it, but he said that you have no salvation because your mind is not right."

He went further and came upon the horse with the short tether. This horse was happy to see Juan's complete bodily form and inquired also about his question, Juan assured him that he would have salvation because he had an honest mind.

THE THEMES

The motif of the One-Sided Man is quite common in folklore — there is need for a good, honest mind. Both men and animals are expected to have this kind of mind. It is the basis for salvation.

Among animals, good mind is shown by the possession of the healthy body; among men, by never judging others but leaving the judgment to God; and among both men and animals, by the desire to know God's will for each individual.

God tests men. For example, he gave Juan a chance to prove his honest mind and initiative in coming to God in order to ask for the reason of his being One-Sided as well as to petition for a more complete form. Juan successfully passed the test and was thus rewarded. The good man who lived at the crossroads and the bad man who dwelt over the waterfall also had their test. Both showed at least the beginning of an honest mind by asking Juan the favor to inquire from God about their respective statuses. In this way, both of them were successful. But in the end the roles were reversed. The reason is that one of them (the originally good one) tried to judge the other. This perhaps lights up an important difference between man and the animals. Man alone judges and condemns others. In so doing, he can lose his honesty and become wicked. On the other hand, the animals do not judge or condemn their fellows. Thus it is impossible for them to lose their righteous mind, nor change their mind from bad to good.

In other words, animals take things as they are. They accept reality with its distinctions and discriminations. Of course, they suffer no moral change either for better or for worse.

Other secondary themes may be pointed out, namely: the fraternal relationship between animals and men; and the common concern showed by both for salvation, whatever that means.

3. THE STORY OF ADAM AND EVE

God, when about to create man, said to the angels: We should create Adam from a solidified earth. This was a revelation to the angels. And he asked them to fetch soil from the four corners of the earth.

But the angels were unable to obtain the soil because they were seduced by the satans or devils.

The reason for the seduction was that the satans were jealous of the angels. God had not revealed to them as he did to the angels the kind of substance to use in creating man. They promised, however, to help the angels obtain the soil from the four corners of the earth if they were also given the *parman*.

The angels reported to God this complaint of the satans. Then God, through the angels, gave his *parman* also to the satans. So the satans and the angels together went to fetch the earth needed for the making of man.

When the soil had been obtained it was mixed together. But Adam had no movement. Besides, he began to crack up because of the sun's heat.

God ordered the angels to pour water on him. But a new problem arose: Adam would not get dry. So God gave another order to apply air to him. But the problem remained: Adam would not move. This time, God commanded them to put fire in Adam. This made him better: he now had within himself: earth, water, air, and fire.

Still, another difficulty came up: whenever Adam sneezed his neck would be pulled off. God gave a revelation to the angels to the effect that Adam should say when sneezing: "Praise be to God." Besides, whenever Adam yawned, his chin would drop and remain fallen on his chest. To prevent this, another *parman* was given enjoining him to say this ejaculation whenever he yawned: "God send the satans away from me." All these problems solved, the *partubuhan* of Adam was complete.

But Adam was alone. God put him to sleep and in his sleep, he dreamt that a rib of his was pulled out of his side and placed on his arms. He woke up and found the beautiful Eve pillowed on his arms. From then on the world began to be peopled.

Their first offsprings were a white boy and a white girl. Next they gave birth to a black boy and a black girl. Then white children married each other; and the blacks did likewise. After their marriage, the children left to find their own home. They bypassed the silver and gold mountains and remained on the iron. The children of the whites and the children of the blacks also married their own color. Thus the white and black races began.

In Paradise or Surgah, a man came to Eve and offered her a fruit to eat. Eating the fruit had been advised against by God and by Adam. Probably Eve did not eat the fruit. That was why Eve was tempted again but in another form.

A little child, newly born, was crying; and Eve hearing the poor thing, ordered the angels to bring the child to her. The baby spoke and said that it was crying because Adam and Eve would be sent out of Paradise because they would not eat of the fruit of the tree. It stopped to cry only after Eve did actually partake of the fruit. Afterwards, Eve induced Adam to eat of the fruit despite his repeated refusals. Since the day Eve squeezed the juice of the fruit into Adam's mouth, both she and Adam began to urinate and defecate in Paradise. Thus they were sent out of it. Until now they can't be found. It was Eve's *napsu* or greed which sent them out of Paradise.

THE THEMES

There are many themes expressed in this myth. But the most important, I think, is the theme of the problem of evil. It is a problem because evil is not a simple thing. In its origin and its continuance, the angels, good and bad, man, and even God, seem to be implicated.

In the myth, evil is considered to be built into the very nature of man. The soil out of which he was fashioned was gathered through the hands of the angels and the satans. In fact, were it not for the help of the satans, the angels would not have obtained it. For they were seduced by the satans the first time they went on their own, under orders from God, to secure the soil from the four corners of the earth. Why did the satans seduce the angels? Out of jealousy because God had not revealed to the satans the material out of which man was to be formed. And there seems to be an indirect though real fault finding with God who had reserved the revelation to the angels and kept it away from the satans. In some sense, too, it appears that the satans had some right to the knowledge of the revelation, otherwise, why did God, after he had been appraised of the jealousy of the satans, acquiesce to let them in on the knowledge, by also granting the revelation to them through the agency of his angels? Thus God appears to be responsible for opening the door to the devil in the making of mankind.

However, there was a card in God's hand which he could always throw in order to foil the work of the satans. This was his powerful *parman* or revelation. What the exact nature of this *parman* is, is not quite clear. But by it God's superiority over all the angels is secured.

The power of the satans over man and the materials that went into his formation seems to be equal if not superior to that of the angels, and is second only to that of God. Without the help of the satans, the angels were powerless to obtain the soil; and even after the material had been obtained, the satans seem to have engineered all sorts of difficulties in the making of man. At the command of God, the angels mixed the soil from the four ends of the world. But Adam would not move. Worse, he began to crack up under the intense heat of the sun. God therefore enjoined the angels to pour water on him. Still a new problem came up. They could not get Adam dry. So God had to order them to apply air on him. Even when dried, Adam still would not move. So God had to command the angels to put fire into Adam. So the four elements are found in man. And these elements, even as earth or the soil, appeared to be under the power also of the satans. For even the Judaic-Christian thought acknowledges that the elements of this world are under the special ken of the "prince of this world."

Nor did the satans cease their contrary activity after man was formed and life and movement was given to him. For whenever Adam sneezed, the satans caused his neck to be pulled off; even if he yawned his chin would not return to its normal position. In each case, only the *parman* or revelation from God was a match to the machinations of the satans. The angels themselves, without the help from God, were powerless.

We have seen that the angels themselves were not immune to the seduction of the satans. The myth also tells us that man, once fully made a man, possessed with life and movement, would not be free from their annoyances. Even in Surgah or Paradise, Adam and Eve did not remain unmolested. The devil, disguised as an adult man one day approached Eve and invited her, to partake of the fruit of the tree, the eating of whose fruit, both God and Adam had warned against. It seems that Eve was firm against this first seduction. But the devil would not be put off. He devised another trick. And it was more calculated to touch the sympathy of the mother and the wife in Eve. He appeared in the form of a little baby, crying. And, liar that he was, he told Eve that he was crying because he knew Adam and Eve would be sent out of Paradise unless they ate of the fruit of the tree. Deceived by her pity for the child and touched by his concern for her and her husband, Eve ate of the fruit. Henceforward,

there was no need for the satans to deceive Adam. Eve was to do the task of seduction herself. Picturesquely, the myth says that Eve squeezed the juice of the fruit into her husband's throat. And they found themselves very human: constrained to perform very human actions. This brought about their expulsion from Paradise and their still being at large. The myth ends with a weak accusation of woman's *napsu* or greed as responsible for the expulsion. I say weak because the whole tenor of the myth from the beginning had alerted us of real and deeper springs of evil and its punishment.

The avowed, though indirect, implication of God, the devil, and the angels in the origin of mankind and of evil in the world is quite common among the myths of many peoples. If there is any merit or validity in them it is this: that they acquaint us of a very important truth—the complexity or the paradox of evil. Although the myth closes with an attribution of the loss of paradise to the greed of women (one can see that the Taosug world is a man's world), one cannot close his eyes to the truth running throughout the myth. There is a will at work in the universe which runs counter to the will of God. This will is equal to that of the angels. In fact, it is shown to be more potent than that of the angels unaided by God. Only the will of God is above it. Yet God is shown to have no complete dominion over it. God may foil the contrary work of the satans by his *parman*. But he is also, as it were, compelled to honor the will of the satans if he must see his designs accomplished. Perhaps this is a crude but valid insight into the awful mysteriousness of free will in both angels and men, and God's powerlessness before the working out of free will which originates from him, as well as of the complicity of created free wills in evil.

Man is subject to the seductions of the satans. For the satans had a hand in his making. But he is not altogether without blame for the evil that he does. Eve was enticed to eat the fruit by her very instincts of pity and gratitude to the infant who was the devil in disguise. Once seduced by the devil, Eve herself has become the instrument for the seduction of her own husband. Nor is Eve or womankind the only seducer. Mankind itself including men have also become seducers. For Eve or woman was part and parcel of Adam or of man. She was drawn from his own side. When Eve fell under the sway of Satan, Adam (man, himself) also fell. The failure of other men and women, that is, their complicity in evil, and their becoming imitators of the satans in the art of leading others to do evil was a foregone conclusion. The more universal theme celebrated in this myth is: man's fall into evil is *also* a thing of *his* making. In this myth, the other complementary theme: man's rise in goodness and virtue is also a thing of his making is not celebrated.

4. KIANGAN ORPHEUS TALE

There once died Bugar, the young spouse of Aliguyung who was left inconsolable in his bereavement. An infant that could not live without its mother's breast increased the anguish of the unhappy widower. The boy cried and wasted away, and his distracted father passed the nights singing him little ditties which could not placate his crying.

"Why do you not come, my beloved spouse? I have just finished a *pangulan* (?) basket for you to go and get camotes with your son on your back. The souls of three pigs I sent to accompany you have not brought me back any news of you. I feel your spirit (*banig*) that slips between the *taranas* (?) of our hut. I caress it and it does not respond; I wish to embrace it, and it flees. Why do you not come? Our son cries, he does not sleep, he is wasting away; if you delay, he will waste away to his death."

Then Aliguyung, seeing that he addressed his wife's shade in vain, resolved to make a trip to Cadungayan, the land of the souls, in search of her.

After many weary days along a painful path, he reached a pleasant valley where it was neither hot nor cold, where rice grows without hull and birds allow themselves to be caught by hand. It is crossed by the clearest of brooks on whose banks grow sturdy trees all filled with delicious fruit. Aliguyung didn't see anybody or any sign of habitation; but at night he heard the sound of voices—souls in conversation. Then he noticed that what by day had appeared as trees were at night changed into cabins which were all filled with people rejoicing and merrymaking.

He looked into one or two of the cabins and noticed that almost all the souls were occupied in spinning. At last having recognized his wife by the sound of her voice, he called to her and she, though with some repugnance, approached him.

"What are you doing here?" He asked her. "You have a child who needs your care to live; he will die if you don't give him your breast, and I, likewise, cannot survive such sorrow."

"I am here," she replied, "waiting for you the same as for him." And she told him of the delights of that lazy life where they lived off the most exquisite foods without it costing any labor.

Nevertheless, Aliguyung insisted that she must accompany her husband so that the child would not die, and she, so as not to increase his pain, agreed to follow him.

They travelled the whole night, and about dawn stopped to rest near a tree. Aliguyung fell into a tired sleep and, upon waking, found no more of his wife than her head. Grieved by this turn of events, he decided to go back home, so he wrapped up his wife's head in a

blanket and put it in his knapsack. He returned to the house; and when he took out the bundle, he found only a piece of wood in place of the head he thought he had been carrying.

Aliguyung was not to be deterred by this trick of fate. He returned to Cadungayan and met his wife again; and tried to get her to go with him. But she convinced him of the impossibility of his desires, saying, "Do not wear yourself out trying to do something impossible. Those who once enter here can never again live with mortals. I will give you a remedy so our child will live: take this handful of rice, which will be sufficient to feed our child till he grows up, but you will take care not to give him more than one grain each time. The day he eats more will be the day of his death."

With this, Bugar bade her husband farewell, telling him that there she would be waiting for him when death came to him, too.

Back home, Aliguyung complied with his wife's instructions, and from then on the child grew extraordinarily robust and never again missed his mother's natural milk.

Some years passed, and when the child was grown big, there were still some grains left of the rice brought from Cadungayan by his father. Ignorant of their power, the boy one day mixed them in their food. He and his father ate it, and in the act met their deaths.

THE THEMES

The major theme in this story is the triumph of the dead over the living.

We see the power of the dead over the living, first of all in the crying and wasting away of the infant, as well as in the anguish of the husband which was double-edged due to his pity for the child and longing for his dead wife.

Again the power of the dead is seen when the husband had to leave home in order to search for his wife in the land of the dead. We also see it in his willingness to undergo the perils of a journey, so painful.

The anguish and pain is reinforced when he sees the happy state of the land of the dead and their seeming disregard for those left behind. Thus he asked:

What are you doing here? You have left a child who needs your care to live; he will die if you don't give him your breast, and I, likewise cannot survive such sorrow.

What irony: the living asking the dead to help them against death!

The answer of the wife betrays her total distance from the worldly pains of her husband. She lives in a totally different world:

"I am here waiting for you the same as for him, i.e., the child." And she told him of the delights of the lazy life where they lived off the most exquisite foods without it costing any labor."

This sends another spasm of pain into the husband's heart.

Another theme is introduced here which, although subordinate, is also quite important to the major theme—the dead tricking the living to believing that they are being helped, only to find in the end that they have been mistaken.

She consents to go with him. At dawn he falls asleep near a tree, tired out from the journey. (Looks like the tree of dream and since his sleeping is an early dawn, the dream promises to be true). But the height of the disillusionment is sharpened by this incident. He wakes up and finds his wife gone. Only the severed head remains which he wraps in his blanket and brings home.

Again the mockery of the living by the dead is quite apparent. Kiangnan victors on the warpath must bring home the heads of their victims in order to be truly considered victors. Here Aliguyung is equivalently being imaged as finally overcoming death, he bringing home the head of his own dead wife. But the semblance yields to reality. He opens the blanket. Instead of the severed head, he finds a piece of dry wood.

Yet man will not give up. He returns to the land of the dead (death triumphant still) and asks for another reprieve. He is bluntly told the truth: "Do not wear yourself out trying to do something impossible. Those who once enter here can never again live with your mortals."

However, death is merciful and grants man another palliative. It will make man forget for a while that he is subject to death. But in the end, the very thing that makes him forget his being bounden to death undoes him.

The wife gives him "a remedy so our child will live: take this handful of rice, which will be sufficient to feed our child till he grows up, but you will take care not to give him more than one grain each time. The day he eats more will be the day of his death." She bade him adieu and told him she would be waiting for him when death comes to claim him.

The husband complied with the wife's instruction. The child grew and waxed into a man. One day, the son seeing some grains of rice left from the handful given to his father by his dead mother, and ignorant of its power, mixed the grains into their food. They both died.

Death allows itself to be put off for a while. In the end he is again the victor. The child grew robust and big. But like a lamb for the sacrifice, he was only being fattened. His mistake in not knowing the power of the rice, undid him and his own father.