Ecophobia and Errancy in the Epic: Ecocritical Reading of the Panay Sugidanon

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Abstract

The Sugidanon, or the epic tradition in Panay, is a rich source of material that allows us to see and understand how the experiences of the folk are inscribed in literature and how such literary forms can be reflective of the folk's consciousness, specifically in terms of how it sees itself in relation not only to other humans, but to the natural world at large.

It is in this light that I wish to read the Sugidanon of Panay from an ecocritical approach, where the entire narrative of the ten epics is hinged on the epic hero's accidental cutting of a sacred bamboo tree that eventually leads to a series of conflict, as seen in the first epic entitled *Tikum Kadlum*, and whose narrative is continued in *Amburukay*. In framing my reading of folk literature with an ecocritical approach, I problematize the notion of ecophobia, defined by Simon Estok as "an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world." I turn to the folk archive to show how this ecophobic discourse is constructed in the Sugidanon and how relationships between humans and nature are conceived in a local context.

Introduction

One of the most cited definitions of ecocriticism is from Cheryll Glotfelty, who defined it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment."[1] According to her, the stance that ecocriticism must take in its analysis of the literary corpus is one that is earth-centered: that is to say, how has nature been

represented in works of art, how does this representation play out in the conceptualization of the encounter between human and nonhuman entities in literature, and how does this open up an interdisciplinary approach to studying literature? Such concerns are central to ecocritical study, and Glotfelty distills the essential inquiry of ecocriticism as "the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it…As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman."[2]

However, such a definition can run the danger of normalizing and reducing forms of knowledges that might be specific to a particular locale given the polyvalence of such concepts including "nature," "place," and "culture." These terms are never static, given that the interactions between human and nonhuman entities accrue meaning over time, such that they can only be understood fully by historicizing their use in the literary corpus. For example, the complex interplay between human consciousness and environmental concerns can never be divorced from its material reality that can only be illuminated by looking at how nature itself has been configured in cultural forms such as literature. An approach to understanding the term "ecology" is to situate it alongside global history. For example, one can think of colonialism, imperialism, and modernity as preconditions for ecological inquiries. This merits significant attention precisely because the consciousness that conceives the idea of the nonhuman other is rooted in history, which for the case of the Global South remains entwined with the trauma of colonialism that radically changed the way in which nature has been viewed, precisely as dominion, as wilderness, as an ecological other.

Thus, attempts to "attach interpretative importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species."[3] The problem of anthropogenic crisis, or environmental catastrophes brought about by human activities, must then be historicized. It is in these theoretical frames that I want to turn to the archive that is our folk literature to particularize these attendant ecological concerns in the Philippines. If colonial discourse is taken to mean as dominant in studying ecocritical terms in literary studies, the folk is that which is constantly effaced by this dominance. However, this effacement is not completely triumphant primarily because it is the folk that resides in the residue, the discourse that remains in the margins. As such, I argue that the folk archive can reveal moments in history in which "nature" has been understood apart from its colonial trappings. This is in no way to valorize the folk in a nativist turn, but merely to acknowledge that

> [a]ny historical analysis of practices and patterns of ecological imperialism must return to this philosophical basis, acknowledging those forms of instrumental reason that view nature and the animal 'other' as being either external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to them, and thus an endlessly replenishable resource.[4]

Thus, this paper hopes to trace how folk consciousness is imagined and rationalized as dwelling in and living with nature, and how these conceptions can be used to enrich contemporary discourses about the environment, especially in debunking the idea of nature as passive and subservient to human needs.

Ecophobic Discourse

The relationship between human and nonhuman, the divide between nature and culture, seems to oscillate between care and contempt. The task of stewardship, for example, is a moral directive that emanates from a genuine desire to live harmoniously with nature, such that all threats of ecological crises are abated. However, given the unpredictability of nature, calamitous events elicit a negative reaction from humans. That nature is equally life-threatening as it is life-giving, in ways that it could wipe out entire ecosystems as part of its geological or biological design to replenish itself, has been ingrained in the popular imagination. It comes as no surprise then that for humans to live in precarity is to regard nature as something that needs to be tamed and controlled within and in terms of the logic of human knowledge. Contempt, then, becomes an affective response to the destructive and uncontrollable force of nature, such that after every calamity there are feelings of intense dislike or scorn towards nature.

It is also possible that both care and contempt can be mutually reinforcing, where the impetus for stewardship is animated by a desire to avoid disasters. In this case, the givenness of precarity is seen as the norm and therefore contempt must be avoided by privileging a nurturing attitude towards nature. On the other hand, contempt can also arise out of mismanaged expectations about biogenic crises that may or may not proceed, causally speaking, from the point of view of care. The energy needed to put in the work to care for nature does not guarantee that nature can always be controlled, and so in times when unexpected calamities occur, a betrayal happens between the pact made by humans with nature. It is in these moments

that capitulating to the forces of nature renders the human to the point of hopelessness and therefore radically rewires the human-nature relationship.

I bring this up to highlight one of the central issues that ecocritical studies have to reckon with: ecophobia. Given the need to define and recognize the discourse that names the object of study of ecocriticism, Simon Estok thinks of ecophobia as "an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world."[5] David Sobel deploys this term as well to describe the phenomenon of "fear of ecological problems and the natural world," which includes "oil spills, rainforest destruction, whale hunting, acid rain, the ozone hole, and Lyme disease."[6] While Sobel's definition differs from Estok, such as the case where the latter thinks of "whale hunting" not so much as ecophobia per se but is rather a result of it, they both agree that ecological problems have been the cornerstone by which reading ecocritically is founded on. To name this object of study in the discourse of ecocriticism is to define properly its methods, and Estok likens this by invoking similar approaches in literary studies. In the same way that feminism/gender theory reads against misogyny and homophobia, Marxist theory reads against class struggle and elitism, and postcolonial theory reads against racism and xenophobia, ecocriticism reads against ecophobia, or more precisely, we attend to the problem of ecophobia the moment we deploy the theoretical apparatuses available for an ecocritic. Thus, ecophobia for Estok has been the defining phenomenon that characterizes the human-nature relationship as conceived in literature and in real life.

Furthermore, according to Estok, ecocriticism makes explicit the recognition of environmental control as an implicit component of ecophobia. Tracing the origins of the illusion of control, for example, way back in the biblical creation myth reveals that stewardship as the divine authority given to humans has produced the idea of control and regulation as a pervasive force in the popular imagination. Furthermore, one of the ways in which this narrative has seeped into the global consciousness is through colonial discourse that characterized the impulse to tame the earth and its wilderness. The justification that is latent in colonial discourse is to domesticate nature in the language of discipline. For example, Peter Hulme notes of the early colonial discourse in Europe and the "discovery" of America:

> This is the vocabulary of discipline, operating on different registers. The chaos of weeds was to be reduced to the neatness of European notions of horticulture, and that hortalan language

> [from the Latin *hortus*, meaning garden] carried with it, in Christian discourse, immediate moral overtones. By (European) definition, of course, savage America was chaotic, but the *particular* difficulty associated with the establishment of the European colonies concerned what might be called the planting of narrative.[7]

Thus, nature must be conceived as something that must be contained: that is, "reduced to neatness" in order for narrativity to blossom. Nature here must first be established as other, as exotic, but must then be overcome to understand its secrets. Savagery, wilderness, and alterity are all necessary invocations to imagine nature as "bad" and propagating this imagination necessitates that contempt and fear become the constitutive emotions that mark any encounter of the human with nature. As such, errancy, as that particular moment of relinquishing control or a transgression that arises from a lack of control, becomes the necessary counterpoint to this ecophobic rhetoric precisely because it dramatizes the nascency of this fear and contempt for the natural world by allowing crisis to happen, specifically in literary texts. In inviting this environmental errancy to happen in a narrative, we ask ourselves about nascent feelings and attitudes that we have about the human-nature relationship at the brink of collapse. It is in these conflicts that we find a most productive space to inquire about the constitution of this relationship, and it would therefore reveal the assumptions that we have about the natural world at large. Thus, when folklore is read ecocritically, such concerns will have to be fleshed out precisely because as narratives concerned with cosmogeny, the human-nature relationship is at the core of understanding how these ecophobic discourses spring from our literary tradition.

Environmental Errancy in the Epics

The literary tradition being analyzed and read ecocritically in this paper is particular to the Panay Bukidnon, an ethnolinguistic group that resides in the highlands of Panay Island. This epic tradition, called the Sugidanon (from the Hiligaynon *sugid*, "to narrate"), has been orally transmitted from generation to generation among the shamans and binukots (kept maidens) of Panay Bukidnon. The Sugidanon is a "mega-epic" containing episodes called bulos, which are chanted independently of each other, but as a whole, provide connectivity in terms of the characters, setting, and themes. In particular, there seems to be a general picture of Panay social life and customs, its maritime environment, and spiritual and ritualistic worldview.

Ecophobia and Errancy in the Epic: Ecocritical Reading of the Panay Sugidanon

Interest in the Panay Sugidanon from the academic community started when Iloilo-born anthropologist F. Landa Jocano did ethnographic fieldwork in Central Panay from 1955 to 1957 to record an epic entitled Hinilawod from a local chanter named Hugan-an. In 1958, Jocano finished the transcription, which was then translated into English in 1959.[8] Before 1955, *Hinilawod* was completely unknown to students of Filipino oral literature. Since then, students of folklore have ventured into the mountains of Central Panay to study the epic.

Jocano's work was continued by his student, Alicia Magos, who then proceeded to record and transcribe other epics from Central Panay from the mid-1980s to 1996. By collaborating with the local chanters, specifically Federico Caballero (Tuohan) who would later on become a Gawad Manlilikha ng Bayan Awardee in 2000 for Epic Literature, the research group led by Dr. Magos would eventually produce ten bulos in various translations (Archaic Kinaray-a, Contemporary Kinaray-a, Tagalog, and English) that would eventually comprise the Sugidanon in printed form. The goal of this project was to preserve and generate scholarly interest in the Sugidanon, and nine out of the ten bulos have already been published by the University of the Philippines Press as of this writing.

The Sugidanon features stories of epic heroes and heroines in a state of conflict whether among themselves or against nature. As with most narratives that feature the supernatural, ecophobia seems to be the premise for the Sugidanon. Tikum Kadlum, the first bulos, begins with the premise of environmental errancy: the epic hero Paiburong hunts wild animals for food. With him is his trusted aide, the enchanted dog Tikum Kadlum, who stops at a nearby bamboo tree and barks at it as if to signify something supernatural about the tree. Annoyed at the incessant barking of *Tikum Kadlum* and after numerous attempts to remove the dog from the tree, Paiburong proceeds to cut the tree. This proves to be a mistake because a gold bell-shaped object is tied to the tree, and this object belongs to a man-eating aswang named Makabigting and his hermit sister named Amburukay. Upon learning about the transgression committed by Paiburong, Makabigting initially decides to kill Paiburong but was swayed by the apologies of the epic hero. As a compromise, Makabigting convinces Paiburong to give up his two daughters, Matan-ayon and Surangga-on. Quite defeated, Paiburong delivers the news to his wife, Bulawanon. However, the husband and wife devise a plan to hide their daughters in order to trick Makabigting. When the appointed time comes, the aswang is able to see through their ruse and is still able to locate the daughters despite them being blackened by soot. As such, the daughters are brought over to the house of Makabigting where they

grow up under the care of *Amburukay*. The second epic, entitled Amburukay, continues this narrative.

From the onset, we can already see the premise of the entire narrative. The environmental errancy provided here is caused by the struggle against nature, which is to hunt for subsistence. The wild animals being hunted here presents an interesting case to argue for the construction of "wildness" in the Panay-Bukidnon imagination. Already, there is a demarcation of what can be considered within the domain of the domiciliary, which is to say tamable, safe, and certain, vis-à-vis the world "out-there" signaled metonymically by a particular danger that lurks beneath the rustling of the verdant jungle. The Karay-a word for wild animal in the epic is "ilahas," which is taken to mean as "animal cimarron, ó móntes"[9] (wild animal, or that which resides in the mountains).[10] The root word here is "ila," defined by Spanish lexicographer Fr. Alonso de Méntrida as "animal, ave, ó persona braba, esquiva, esto es, no mansa, cimarrona" and "hacerse, o estar cimarron como gato de algalia, animal, ave, ó persona."[11] Mentrida's entry roughly translates to "animal, bird, or a rough and sullen person that is, not meek and wild; to become wild like a masked palm civet, animal, bird, or person." This definition is further corroborated by "ila" as "wild, savage, ferocious, not domestic, undomesticated, untamed, not tame; to be or become wild, etc."[12] The Tagalog translation here is "mailap na hayop," a quality that connotes wildness as something that is hidden and resists being caught. Coming from these philological traversals, wildness designates that particular quality of nature that is marked by a certain distance from the domain of safety and that remains elusive.

Moreover, the epic hero must possess the attribute of wildness (persona braba, a corrupted form of brava, which means brave) in order to productively struggle against nature. The associations with bravery as valiente (valiant) but also arriesgado (risk-taker, a term still in currency in contemporary Hiligaynon) point to the multiple valences of wildness when conferred to a person who must tame nature. In short, the epic hero must mirror the quality of nature in order for the latter to reveal itself, to lay bare its secrets, and in the process become instrumental for the survival of the human. These provide the textures by which wildness is imagined and articulated in the folk archive.

How, then, does nature respond to this? First, we already have the dog Tikum Kadlum as having a non-anthropocentric point-of-view that cautions the epic hero about the imminent threat of wildness. Right after departing his dwelling to hunt for food, Paiburong notices that Tikum Kadlum incessantly barks and yet

Paiburong remarks: "Wara kita it pinamati-an / Wara gid it nabati-an" (Nothing can be heard / Nothing can be felt).[13] Paiburong readies himself to anticipate any encounter with wildness but is crestfallen upon knowing that there is nothing to see. He dismisses the dog as follows: "Daw buang matuod / Nagabinuang tana / Diyang si Tikum Kadlum" (He is foolish / He is stupid / This dog, Tikum Kadlum).[14] To appease the dog, he decides to cut down the bamboo at which the barking is directed, only to realize that it belongs to the aswang Makabigting.

This scene presents to us the instance of a frontier of ecocriticism that needs to be articulated further: in many ways, ecocriticism is devoted to the agentic representation of the folk to be able to converse with the modern, but not in a primitivist or nativist gesture, to enable them to truly speak by themselves, about themselves. However, the conversation operates within a hermeneutic circle that has, at its core, human logic. Ecocritic Ignasi Ribó problematizes this fluency and facility in articulation as "the speechlessness of all those nonhuman others that are excluded, not just from literature and social discourse, but from human language itself."[15] What are we to make of the dog's barking as a caution to environmental errancy? In the epic, Paiburong obviously dismisses this warning as merely noise, therefore not worth his time. This immiscibility between human logic and nonhuman inarticulacy becomes a crucial point that ecocriticism tries to resolve by pointing towards an interpretive gesture that demands from humans an attempt to displace this anthropocentric logos at the service of the world at large. Similarly, Ribó calls for a "hermeneutic turn" to deal with this problem that plagues ecocritical study that remains fixated on the literary as its base. He calls for

> the adoption of *ethnographic* methods to unveil the being-in-the-world of those human others that are often silenced or mediated by literary discourse and the development of new and effective *zoographic* methods of unveiling the being-in-the-world of nonhuman others through an attentive dialogue rather than through anthropocentric coercion.[16]

This turn to ethnography, especially the ways in which it can reveal the customs, beliefs, and the material world of the folk, is what the archive can bring to further enrich a theorization of ecocriticism imbued by praxis. As folkloristic studies inevitably entail an ethnographic dimension, the archive has much to say about these sentient beings that have long been overshadowed by the human consciousness in literary discourse. The epics have long been a rich trove of indigenous knowledge that offers alternative ways of looking at dwelling, nature, and nonhuman consciousness. The instance of Paiburong's misrecognition of Tikum Kadlum's "foolish" behavior

leads to the possibility of inquiring about the role of critical animal studies to study animal behavior in ways that have not been done before. The assumption that the nonhuman other is able to speak but not in a language known to us yet can be a way to cast off ideas that the world can only be explained by the privileging of human dominion. There is a point to be made here about the epic's privileging of the wisdom of the nonhuman over the non-awareness of the human, which also invites us to recalibrate our own ideas about wildness when we use it to describe an animal's behavior. What appears as wildness can possibly be a misrecognition on our part, which is the conceit enabled by human-centered thinking.

That Tikum Kadlum is nonhuman and domesticated, that is, opposed to wildness established earlier, presents another layer of liminality in this reading of errancy and ecophobia. What this scene tells us is that wildness needs to be tamed to be understood, and yet even when it is tamed it still does not guarantee total comprehensibility. The argument inevitably falls back to the affirmation that the divide between human and nature is as glaring as ever. How to bridge this gap is the pressing question that the epic seems to provide a pedagogical insight about. In a way, the epic tells us, quite didactically, to be attuned to nature. This resonance with nature is rendered in the epic as an impulse to feel (batiag) nature, which in Mentrida's *Diccionario* has as its cognate "bati" (hear) and both are defined as "sentir"[17] (to feel). The affective response seems to override this anthropocentric logic, such that to be intimately linked to the language of nature requires an intuitive sense of one's relation to nature.

Perhaps this is the challenge to ecocritical study by way of the folk: to be able to articulate a theoretical standpoint by which affect, as empathy, becomes the foundation for dwelling in and with nature. In the epic, Paiburong's sentience is faced with its own limits. The folk consciousness seems to make a point that even its own epic heroes can be just as dissociated from nature even when ancient folk life, as evidenced in the epic, assumes that he must be a child of nature. Thus, the epic hero is enjoined to develop a hypersonic way of hearing the language of nature. This notion has always been at the core of environment studies, from learning about animal psychology to marking out patterns of botanical behavior, such that listening to the nonhuman other is indeed possible and therefore demands critical attention from an interdisciplinary perspective. In fostering this capacity to sense and feel with nature, ecophobia can be recast from control to care, from an articulation of wildness as difference into wildness as sameness. Such a turn may have enjoyed currency now in contemporary ecocritical thought, but the folk, specifically in a regional Philippine context, has already anticipated it.

Tuos and Ecophilic Discourse

When Tikum Kadlum made apparent the errancy committed by Paiburong, we see the confrontation between the aswang Makabigting and the epic hero, the former demanding an exchange between the fallen bamboo tree and the latter's two daughters. It is interesting to note here that Makabigting serves as the keeper or guardian of nature and yet he is described as a "tagubalbal" or a nobleman ("buyong"), typically a warrior that is generally respected in the community but one who committed the taboo of tasting or eating human flesh.[18] This errancy is also what makes Makabigting the ultimate figure of wildness, such that to commit this transgression is enough to cast him off from the domain of human habitation and designate him as a monstrous figure. The aswang must therefore atone for this violation by embodying wildness, but to do so would mean to mark out spaces where this wildness can be truly enacted and performed. Ironically enough, the aswang can be argued to be stewards of nature in the folk imagination, and therefore their presence is a constant reminder to humans that such monstrous figures are metonyms for nature itself, which follows the same ecophobic rhetoric as established earlier. One must therefore be careful not to anger the tagubalbal, such as by disrupting the natural order of things, or else dire consequences will happen. As such, the epic reinforces the idea that nature is to be feared, for there are monstrous entities that might exact revenge for any infraction done in their domain.

However, the epic also presents a strange juxtaposition of the figure of nature, embodied as monster dwellers, as both frightening but also caring. After obtaining the two daughters from Paiburong, Makabigting returns home and tells his sister, Amburukay, to boil water in a pot. The epic suggests that this is indicative of Makabigting giving in to his monstrous nature and plans to devour the two daughters. However, Amburukay's maternal instinct prevails, and she decides to keep the daughters inside a gold chamber. She even cautions Makabigting to not enter the room for fear that her brother might fall in love with them. She becomes emotionally invested in their growth to the point of claiming them as her own children: "Kang mga urihing ulpot / Ang akon mga bag-ong buskag" (With my young ones / My newly grown children).[19] The botanical imagery here is quite appropriate, for the daughters were the price to be paid for the fallen tree, and yet they grow under the auspices of this monstrous figure only to blossom again as flowers (translated in Tagalog as "huling sibol" and "bagong bukadkad"). In a way, the recuperative aspect of this narrative presents a complication to the very figure of nature as monstrous.

In the second epic, *Amburukay*, the narrative begins with the hero Labaw Donggon breaking the strings

of his guitar, and he must therefore find a way to repair the musical instrument. Upon conferring with his spirit friend Taghuy, Labaw Donggon decides to search for Amburukay's golden pubic hair as replacement for the broken strings. He ventures to the dwelling of Amburukay and successfully cuts her pubic hair after enchanting her to sleep. However, unbeknownst to him, a sacred pact is attached to the pubic hair: whoever manages to get hold of it must marry Amburukay. Labaw Donggon is resigned to his fate of marrying an aswang, but during the wedding day it is revealed that Amburukay deems Labaw Donggon as worthy enough to marry her adoptive daughters: Matan-ayon and Surangga-on. After seeing her daughters attaining happiness with Labaw Donggon through marriage, Amburukay then retreats back to the wilderness.

Crucial to this narrative is the foregrounding of the sacred contract, called tu-os, which is defined in the epics as pledge,[20] a vow,[21] or a gift of high value or something very precious to seal a promise for an oral agreement.[22] The tu-os is what maintains both the ecological and social order in the epic world primarily because once it is broken, a reparation must be made in the form of equivalence. In both *Tikum Kadlum* and *Amburukay*, the tu-os is that which secures the bond between humans and nature, such that any form of malevolence should be repaid with a form of sacrifice to restore the balance caused by errancy. In particular, it is what keeps the two daughters secure under the care of Amburukay, such that she makes the proclamation of not letting them go unless the tu-os inscribed in her pubic hair is broken. Amburukay sets the parameter for such an exchange: whoever gets hold of her pubic hair should exchange his life for it, but if such a man is good-looking and a distinguished nobleman, she will relinquish her control over her daughters to the man who will become their husband: "Mangin kapihak kang dughan / Mangin asawa mo kalibutan"[23] (He will be your pride in the world / He will be your husband in the land). As such, in the second epic, once Amburukay discovers the thief, she reneged on her initial threat and decided to marry off her two daughters.

What is at stake here is a form of reciprocity that outlines the folk conception of human-nature relationship that is premised on ecophobia but that the figuration of nature here is not absolutely monstrous so as to render humans perpetually in fear in the face of such entities. I turn to the local lexicon that best describes this moment of reciprocation as balos: "retribución, bien por bien, ó mal por mal, de obra ó de palabra"[24] (retribution, good for good, or evil for evil, pertaining to one's deed or word). In contemporary Hiligaynon, balos refers to a reaction of equal or greater magnitude that repays a preceding act. One thus performs balos out of gratitude or revenge. Through balos, we are able to make sense of the errancy as

imbricated in a network of reward or punishment. The repercussions of these errancies demand a sacrifice on the part of humans, and yet we also see this gesture being done by Amburukay: she sacrifices her daughters, her *raison d'être*. Despite being configured as a monstrous figure, Amburukay rewards the thief Labaw Donggon as a form of ultimate sacrifice. This apparent ambiguity regarding Amburukay's motive and behavior also gives us an insight in terms of how the aswang functions in folk literature, which is to say that this ambiguity also suffuses the folk's conception of how humans are to regard nature. It is important to note that the sacrifice of Amburukay demands reciprocation, and it is best understood as an invitation for Labaw Donggon to participate in the act of gift-giving. The second epic ends with the retreat of Amburukay to the wilderness, and she presents to her daughters her parting words:[25]

To understand further the logic of gift-giving that occurs between Amburukay and Labaw Donggon, I turn to Marcel Mauss' study on the nature of the gift as one that imposes an "obligatory time limit,"[26] which is to say that reciprocity is central to the act of gift-giving and that this reciprocity is also temporally bound. One is expected to perform balos within an opportune time period. However, Amburukay's departure circumvents the logic of gift-giving because "time is needed in order to perform any counter-service."[27] By asking her daughters to "stay here for a while," we are preempted with an eventual return at a designated

Kinaray-a	Tagalog	English
Ano pa ang inyong pangayu-on	Ano pa'ng inyong hihilingin	What else are you asking for?
Hay may rig-on kamo nga balay	Dahil may matibay kayong bahay	Because you already have durable homes
May pangabuhi ron kamo	May sariling pamumuhay na	You already have lives of your own
Rugya lang kamo anay	Dito lang muna kayo	You have to stay here for a while
Mauli ko sa talon	Uuwi ako sa gubat	I will go back to the forest
Mauli sa kakahuyan	Uuwi sa kakahuyan	I will go back to the wilderness

time that is yet to be announced. This departure signals an arrest of the time contract in gift-giving such that it is stretched out to eternity, which is to say that balos as "retribuir asi gratificar" (to repay) dissolves in the outpouring of Amburukay as an embodiment of nature itself. Nature here, I argue, refuses to adhere to the time limit of reciprocity because it is already poised towards giving its excesses. Amburukay's balos is then reconfigured into something that is not just the object that is given totally to the human, but precisely as the gesture of making one's self the gift. In short, the gift is what one makes to the self, the gift distilled to the assertion and sacrifice of Amburukay's self. Her willful neglect of the time contract enables us to understand the amorous reply of nature.

Thus, it is this affective response towards nature that is demanded from Labaw Donggon and from humanity itself. The ecophobic rhetoric dissolves in this imbrication of the affective discourse of nature's amorosity as perpetual gift-giving. In the epics, the desire to preserve nature is not animated by contempt or fear of the disastrous, and we see that nature demands from the other an amorous response. Perhaps it is in the multivalence of the Hiligaynon speciation of eros as langga: "regalon, que quiere le regalen, y acaricien"[28] (regalon as "present," that is, to be one's gift that is given and is caressed, which in my own interpellation, is taken to mean as one that is "beloved"), or that of angga: "ser o hacerse regalon; regalon que quiere que le regalen y acaricien"[29] (to be one's beloved, one that is both given and caressed). Langga, as one is wont to say in Hiligaynon "Palangga ta ka" to express the tenderness of love to the other, becomes a distinct lexical species that can be used to develop a vocabulary to understand the human-nature relationship in the epic as ecophilic, buoyed by the folk belief in tu-os. In the end, the epic becomes a living contract of how the folk imagination has speculated about the ideal human-nature dynamic, and we are reminded of this vow of eternal repayment for a gift that has always been there for the taking. Amburukay's question at the end of the epic becomes a constant reminder of this gift: What else are you looking for?

In developing fluency to articulate ecocritical thought rooted in culture and history, the folk archive, such as the case in *Tikum Kadlum* and *Amburukay*, is indeed a wellspring from which collective knowledge can be further scrutinized to give us new insights about how we see ourselves and the world. The epics allows us to revisit how the folk imagination has conceived a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, one that remains idealized and therefore aspirational. They also invite us to reimagine ways of living that somehow resist the

acceptance of the world as it is, a resistance that can only be truly political in its stance. These become all the more crucial at a time where the Anthropocene follows the logic of apocalyptic time, where the natural order of the world is seen to be hurtling towards its own destruction. Thus, it should be illuminating to see how an ecocritical reading of folk literature equips us with a disposition that speculates a more livable world, an idea of folk time where the prelapsarian and the present can coexist and where concepts of wildness, dwelling, sentience, etc. are charged with a local and therefore more immediate context to bring about environmental praxis that is attuned to and is constantly informed by indigenous knowledge. In making a claim for the provenance of ecocritical thought in folk literature, we can conceptualize and codify ecocritical terms that are organically drawn from the wellspring of folk knowledge to further challenge and unsettle global theory and to be more inclusive of systems of thought that have for so long been relegated into the periphery of literary studies.

Notes

[1] Cheryl Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, eds. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harrold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.

[2] Glotfelty, xix.

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