

Capítulo 2

DE LAS LETRAS Y MODO DE ESCRIBIR DE LOS BISAYAS; Y DE SUS POESIAS, VARIAS Y PARTICULARES, DE QUE SE PRECIAN

Trataré primero de las letras en cuanto a su pronunciación, que es natural, y del modo como estos naturales las pronuncian, que es en muchas muy distinto del nuestro, ni tienen tantas como nosotros, teniendo alguna que nosotros allá no conocemos; y, en el remate de este capítulo, pondré su modo de escribir y leer con los caracteres que hoy se usan, nuevos entre los bisayas, pues en su antigüedad no les supieron ni los usaron hasta muy pocos años que fuesen cristianos, como luego diremos.

Veintidós letras se suelen contar en nuestro alfabeto español, sacadas de los latinos, y entre ellas cinco vocales, dividiéndose las demás entre mudas y líquidas, y de la *H* dicen algunos que no les es sino sola aspiración, formándose de estas pocas letras todas cuantas palabras hay, ha habido, y habrá en todo el mundo, sea la lengua que se fuere; y, aunque en el modo de formarlas por escrito hay tanta variedad como en las palabras, en el modo de pronunciarlas no la hay, sino más o menos blandura o aspereza; herir más o menos, formándose en las bocas las voces de todas, aunque no todas con la misma suavidad, pues no son pocas las que se pronuncian con la garganta, que llamamos gutural, dando escabrosidad y dureza a las letras, no porque sea suya y la pidan, sino

Chapter 2

CONCERNING THE ALPHABET AND THE MANNER OF WRITING OF THE BISAYANS; THE VARIOUS AND PARTICULAR TYPES OF POETRY IN WHICH THEY TAKE PRIDE

At first I shall speak about the letters in regard to their pronounciation which is their natural way and about the manner in which the natives pronounce them, which in many instances is very different from ours. Nor do they have as many as ours, having one or another that we over there [i.e. in Spain] do not know about. At the end of this chapter I shall give their method of writing and reading with the characters that they use today (and which are) new among the Bisayans; for in their antiquity they did not know these, nor did they use them until very shortly before they became Christians, as we shall say later.

Normally, we count twenty-two letters in our Spanish alphabet and which are taken from the Latin; among them, five are vowels while the rest are divided into silent and liquid [consonants]. Concerning the *H*, some say that it is nothing but an aspiration. These few letters form all the words that exist, have existed, or will ever exist in the whole world, regardless of the language. And although there is as great a variety in the words themselves as in the manner of putting the letters [together] in writing, yet there is no such [variety] in pronouncing them, but more or less, [just] softness or asperity – for emphasis, more or less. All the sounds are formed in the mouth, although not all of them with the same softness, because there are not a few who pronounce with the throat which we call guttural, making the letters harsh and hard. (The reason for this is) not because this is its nature and

por la pronunciación mala que las ahoga, diferenciándose casi todas las lenguas más en la pronunciación, que cada nación tiene casi la suya, que en los elementos y letras. Y así pondré la que en esta lengua bisaya, que ya dije que es suave y tan blanda como la española en lo más, hay distinto de la nuestra, dejando las demás, que no me tocan.

Tres vocales tienen, no más, estos naturales de suyo, aunque son cinco en realidad de verdad; estas son: *A*, que tiene siempre la pronunciación, firme e invariada; *E* que no la distinguen de la *I*, antes las confunden tanto que muchos ni pronuncian *I* claramente ni *E*, sino como un diptongo de *E* y *I*, trocándolas y variándolas cuando escriben, aun en nuestra lengua y caracteres españoles, tanto que no sé hasta hoy que se haya hallado indio alguno, ni bisaya ni tagalo, que en esto todos son unos, que no las confundan y truequen, aunque sean muy ladinos y entendidos en nuestros caracteres: y aunque trasladen de un papel en otro, de mil no se hallarán dos que no confundan estas dos letras *E* y *I*, aun en el escribir y trasladar, y mucho más en el pronunciar sin que en esto hasta hoy en cuantas diligencias hemos hecho, que no son pocas, y aun criándose entre nosotros desde niños muchos de ellos se haya podido recabar cosa considerable, por ser pronunciación natural suya y no desdecirles a ellos su alteración como a nosotros.

Lo mismo pasa entre la *O* y la *U*, que también las confunden en el escribir como en el pronunciar; y con ser verdad que aun entre ellos, pronunciando la *O* entera, tienen diferente significación las palabras que, pronunciada la *U* como tal; como en esta palabra: *Obo*, con *O*, que quiere decir: voz o desnudarse; y *Ubu*, con *U* que quiere decir: humillarse o bajar la cabeza; y, con todo eso, comúnmente confunden estas dos letras tanto que ni sabemos si dice *O* ó si dice *U*, o si es diptongo de uno y otro, que ni aprieta tanto como *U* ni tan blando como *O*; y lo que más es, y nos sucede no pocas

it requires it, but because of the faulty pronunciation which smothers them. Almost all the languages differ especially in the pronunciation since every nation has its own principles and letters. Hence, I shall jot down that in this Bisayan language, which I have already said is soft and as smooth as the Spanish, all in all, it is different from ours. The rest I am leaving aside, for it does not concern me.

The natives have three vowels of their own and no more; in truth, there are really only five. These are: *A*, which always has a constant and an invariable pronunciation; *E* which they fail to distinguish from the *I*; instead, they so confuse them that many neither pronounce *I* clearly nor the *E*, but rather as a diphthong of *E* and *I*. They interchange them and substitute one for the other even when writing in our language and in the Spanish characters. [This they do] to such an extent that I do not know whether to this day a native has been found – whether Bisayan or Tagalog, for in this matter all are the same – who does not confuse and interchange them, even though he may be well versed in our language and disciplined in our character. When they transcribe from one page to another, out of a thousand of them there are not even two of them who do not confuse these two letters *E* and *I*, even when writing or copying – and even much more so when pronouncing them. [This continues] notwithstanding the many efforts, which are not a few, that we have made in this matter till now; many of them were brought up among us from childhood and yet we still have accomplished nothing worthy of note (among them) because such is their natural pronunciation. This kind of an interchange does not appear awkward to them as it does to us.

The same may be said about the *O* and the *U*, which they also confuse in their writing as well as in their pronunciation. It is true that even among themselves when they pronounce the *O* fully, the words have a different meaning than were the *U* is pronounced in the same matter, as it happens, in this word: *ubo*, which means 'to humble oneself' or 'to bow the head'; *ubu* with a *u*, which means 'to cough' or 'to undress'. Notwithstanding all this they commonly confuse these two letters to such an extent that we do not know if they are saying *O* or if they are saying *U*, or whether it is a diphthong made of the one and the other. It is neither opened up fully as a *U* nor pronounced as softly as an *O*.

veces, esta duda: solemos estar dos y tres y más Padres oyendo a un indio a un mismo tiempo y una misma palabra, y al uno le parece que la pronuncia con blandura de *O* y al otro con dureza de *U*, porfiando no pocas veces y mandándoles repetir, sin acabarse de determinar cuál fue su pronunciación.

Tanto como esto confunden su pronunciación; así que en rigor sola la *A* es vocal invariable; las otras dos mixtas de *E* y *I*, de *O* y *U*, aunque en algunas partes, en que hablan más pulido, las suavizan más de una y otra vocal; y en otras al contrario las endurecen, apretando los dientes al pronunciarlas, y estos hacen más escabrosa la lengua.

De muda y líquida en las consonantes no conocen distinción de suyo, aunque aprenden la nuestra; porque, como veremos, en su escritura a todas las consonantes pronuncian con *A*, y como nosotros pronunciamos *De* dicen ellos *Da*, y a la *Ele*, *La* y a la *G*, *Ga*: a la *M*, *Ma*; y así a todas.

Confunden, empero, entre sí mucho a estas letras: *L*, *R*, *D*, de modo que son como una sola letra entre ellos, y no sabéis si es *Ele*, o si *Erre*, o si *De* la que pronuncian comúnmente, porque, o lo dicen todo confuso, o no se sabe determinar cuál es de las tres letras¹; aunque en esto hay entre ellos mucha variedad, porque en algunas partes todas tres las pronuncian como *R* con que hacen la pronunciación ruidosa, por no decir, rabiosa.²

Otros, al revés, todo lo pronuncian con *L*, sin rastro de *R*; y de la misma manera la *D*; con lo cual podemos decir que de estas tres letras lo más común es hacer una que suple las otras dos, o las confunde.

No tienen *F* ni la pronuncian; sino que la *P* les sirve de *F*, pronunciándola no tan dura como *P*, ni tan blanda como nuestra *F*, sino un mixto; hánla aprendido ya y la pronuncian en nuestras

What is more, and this happens to us not a few times, is this perplexity: we may be two or three or even more Fathers listening to a native at the same time and to the same word; to one it seems that he pronounced it with the softness of an *O* and to another, with the hardness of a *U*. Not a few times did they insist and order him to repeat, but they were unable to determine how it was pronounced.

In such a manner do they confuse their pronunciation. Strictly speaking then, only the vowel *A* remains invariable; the other two are a mixture of *E* and *I* and of *O* and *U*. Yet, in other places where they speak in a more polished manner, they soften the one or the other vowel a little more; while others, on the contrary, make them hard as if gnashing their teeth when pronouncing them. This renders the language very harsh.

About the mute and liquid consonants, they do not distinguish them among themselves, however, they do learn ours. As we shall see, in their writing they pronounce all the consonants with an *A*. As we pronounce *De*, they say *Da*, and the *Ele* as *la*; the *G* as *Ga*; the *M* as *Ma*, and so on with all the rest.

Very often, among themselves, they confuse the letters *L*, *R*, and *D* in such a manner that they seem to be like one and the same letter to them. [As a result], one cannot tell whether it is *Eli* or *Eri*, or *Di* which they commonly pronounce; or they confuse it all and are unable to determine which of the three letters it should be.¹ Yet, among them, in this manner, there is a great variety because in some places all three are pronounced as an *R*, thus making their pronunciation ill-sounding if not to say outrageous.²

Others, on the other hand, pronounce them all with an *L* without any trace of an *R* and the *D* in the same manner, in such a way that we can say about these three letters, that the common practice is to make one substitute the other or just employ them interchangeably.

They do not have an *F* nor are they able to pronounce it. Instead, the *P* serves them as an *F*; they do not pronounce it as hard as the *P* nor as softly as our *F*, but in a sort-of combination. [Now] they have already learned to pronounce it in our words and

palabras y las latinas con distinción de *F* y de *P* y de *Ph*; pero, entre sus palabras, ninguna se hallará que comience por *F*, ni aun que la tenga en medio de la dicción; porque de la *P* se valieron en su antigüedad solamente, y no nos cuesta poco trabajo el ajustarles a que, cuando escriben en nuestra letra y palabras, no recurran a su antigüedad escribiendo: *propeta* por *profeta*; *pama*, *plor*, etc., por *fama*, *flor*, etc., porque a ésto los suena a ellos la *P*, o a un mixto de ambas.

La letra *H* siempre fue letra suya, y muy necesaria a esta lengua para la buena pronunciación; porque es mucha la diferencia que hay en pronunciarla o no, trocando totalmente el sentido de las voces el pronunciarlas con *H* o sin ella. Y así esta lengua se pronuncia acá y debe pronunciarse: *ha*, *he*, *ho*, con la calidad de las tres vocales que decíamos poco ha, porque con todas ellas se la acompaña su pronunciación acá; es suave y media entre aspiración sola y pronunciación afectada, porque de los que pronuncian la *H* a lo andaluz se ríen porque disuena mucho y altera la pronunciación, y no la entienden; y, si no se pronuncia hiriendo algo, es yerro también y muda sentido; y es tanta verdad ésto que, dejando que una palabra con *H* o sin ella, siendo la misma, tienen distintísima significación, como *Hari*, que quiere decir Rey, y *Ari*, aquí; *Halas* significa culebra, y *Alas* escoger lo mejor; *Hilao*, cosa cruda, o sea fruta o comida, etc., *Ilao*, cosa cerril, montaraz, y el resplandor del fuego, etc.; y de esta manera pudiera traer millares de palabras.

En medio de la dicción importa muchísimo el usar en su lugar de la *H* o no usarla; porque, por falta de ella, en alguna palabras compuestas, se muda el sentido, y por la sobra se trueca tanto que suceden algunas cacofonías muy feas en esta lengua y de que se ríen mucho cuando nos las oyen a los europeos que saben, en especial a los ministros nuevos, que las erramos con facilidad; pero entre los suyos son tal vez baldones y palabras de que se afrentan mucho y ocasionan muchos disgustos, de que pudiera traer muchos ejemplos, que por no hacer al caso y no

in Latin, making the distinction between the *F* and the *P* and the *Ph*. However, among the words, they do not have any that begins with the letter *F* nor do they even have it anywhere within a word, because in their ancient times, they made use only of the letter *P*. It cost us no little effort in convincing them that when they write in our letters and words, they should not revert to their ancient way of writing: '*propeta*' for *profeta*, '*pama*', '*plor*', etc. for *fama*, *flor*, etc.; because the *F* sounds like this to them, or like a combination of both.

The letter *H* was always their letter, and is very necessary to this language for fine pronunciation, because the difference in pronouncing it or not pronouncing it is great. The meaning of the word is completely changed by its use or omission; hence, in this language it must be pronounced: *Ha*, *Hi*, *Ho*, with the characteristics of the three vowels about which we have spoken a while ago. [That is], the letter *H* is pronounced with the help of the three vowels, which qualify its pronunciation. This is soft and like something between a mere aspiration and an affected pronunciation. They are moved to laughter when they hear the *H* pronounced in the *Andalusian* manner because it sounds strange and it alters the pronunciation and therefore they do not understand it. And, if it is not pronounced with a bit of stress, it is also an error and changes the meaning, and this is so true, that pronouncing a word with an *H* or without it, even though it is the same, it has a very different meaning, as for example: *hari*, which means a 'king', while *ari*, means 'here'; *halas* means a 'snake' while *alas* means 'to choose the best'; *hilaw* means a 'green thing' whether a fruit or a food, etc., while *ilaw* means a 'wild, or an untamed thing' and also 'the brilliance of light', etc. In this manner, I can produce a million words.

In the midst of an expression it is very important to use or not to use the *H* in its place, because if omitted in some composite words, the meaning is changed so much so that it becomes cacophonous, very ill-sounding in this language. They laugh rather heartily from the Europeans whom they know when they hear them, especially the newly-arrived ministers, who err in this matter quite readily. But among their own they are, per chance, insults and words they greatly resent and thereby occasion much disgust. About this, I am able to cite many examples, but since these are of

entenderse de los que no están muy [impuestos] en esta lengua, los deajo, avisando solo a los que la aprenden, que los adviertan y reparen mucho, porque se yerra feamente en esto no pocas veces.

X ni J tampoco las tienen, sirviéndose de la *K*³ que llaman: *Kaka*, en su lugar, y también los sirve de *Q*, por lo cual estas tres letras están de sobra para ellos y en ninguna de sus palabras sirven; y así, en su antigüedad, no las conocieron, ni hoy en su modo de escribir las usan, excepto la *Q*, que ya la van entablando los más ladinos y nosotros los ministros en muchas palabras suyas, porque con ellas se pronuncian mejor, y, escribiendo ya con nuestras letras, como escribimos todos los PP. Ministros y de ellos los que saben escribir nuestra letra, sus palabras, algunas de ellas, escritas con nuestra *C*, mudaran sentido, lo cual no corre con sus caracteres, porque de suyo ya son y tienen fuerza de *Q*, aunque son *C*, como veremos en sus letras.

Una letra con todo esto tienen estos naturales, que no la tenemos nosotros, y ésta suena: *NG*, y la llaman *NGA*, y se pronuncia algo con las narices, y a este modo de pronunciar, que es muy necesario entre ellos y común, llamamos “gangoso,” y es muy diferente de nuestra *N* y *G*, pronunciadas a nuestro modo, porque, cuando concurren en una palabra estas dos letras, aun (en) esta lengua bisaya, y no es la *NGA*, que decimos, la *N* se pronuncia con la vocal antecedente y la *G* con la siguiente, y no con la nariz, porque son verdaderamente otras letras que esta que llamamos gangosa; y así, o ya inicial o al principio de la palabra, o ya media, siempre es una sola y se pronuncia o con la vocal antecedente o con la subsiguiente como una sola letra, que realmente lo es entre estos naturales, y sirva de ejemplo uno por muchos que se hallan en esta lengua: *Agar*, es “seguir,” y de ahí: *Hagar* [vel HAGAR], “criado” y *Pagagar*, “servir como tal el que no es esclavo, o seguir a otro”; y *Pangangar*, es “seguir o servir el yerno a su suegro”.

little consequence to us, and because these cannot be understood by those who are not very proficient in this language, I omit them. I only urge those who are learning it to take notice and pay careful attention to them, because one can err terribly in this and not infrequently.

They neither have the *X* or the *J*; instead they make use of the *K*³ which they call *Kaka*; they also use the *Q* in its place. As a result, these three letters are superfluous for them and are not used in any of their words. Thus, in their antiquity they did not know about them, nor do they use them today in their writing except for the letter *Q*. Today the more competent linguists, and we the ministers also, are adopting it in many of their words, because with their help these are pronounced better. Already, they are writing [with theirs]; among them are those who know how to write their word in our letters. Some of these which are written with our *C*, change the meaning; this does not happen, [however], when written in their own characters; for of themselves as they are and have the force of a *Q*, even though they are [written] as a *K*, as we shall see in their alphabet.

All in all, these natives have one letter that we do not have; it sounds like *NG*, and they call it *nga* and it has a somewhat nasal sound. This mode of pronunciation which is very necessary and common among them, we call a nasal twang [a snuffle]. It is very different from our *N* and *G* and the way it is pronounced because when these two come together in a word they are two letters in this Bisayan language. It is not the *nga* to which we refer. The *N* is pronounced together with the preceding vowel, and the *G* with the following one, and not through the nasal passages. In reality they are different letters than the kind which we call a snuffle. Thus, whether it is either the initial one or at the beginning of a word or at the middle, it is always one by itself and is pronounced either with the preceding vowel or with the following one as a single letter – for that is how it really is among these natives. One example may suffice for the many that we find in this language: *agar* means ‘to follow’, hence *alagar*, ‘servant’; *pagagar*, ‘to serve as one who is not a slave, or ‘to follow another’; and *pangagar* is ‘to follow and serve’ as the son-in-law, his father-in-law.

Tanto como esto diferencia la significación en una misma palabra, la variedad de una u otra letra; y de esta manera hay muchas palabras y mucha variación en ellas por mudar, añadir o quitar una sola letra. Y esto baste de su pronunciación.

Vengamos ya a sus poesías, que, aunque no con la variedad de metros consonantes y asonantes como las nuestras, aunque tienen también sus consonancias algo distintas de las nuestras, nos exceden en ellas a nosotros, sin duda, porque es muy diferente el lenguaje, aun en lo más de las palabras que usan en sus poesías del que usan en el hablar ordinario y común; y es en tanto grado que hay muy pocos de los europeos, aunque sean muy buenas lenguas y sepan mucho bisaya, que entiendan sus poesías ni ritmo, aunque las oigan; porque, además de ser, *ut plurimum*, diferentes en el metro las palabras y razones, aun usando de las palabras ordinarias que tal vez acompañan a las políticas, es tan metafórico cuanto dicen en verso que todo son finísimas metáforas, y, quien no las entiende y sabe, es imposible que las entienda a ellas.

Ya había mas de cinco años que yo sabía esta lengua con alguna extensión, y siempre que les oía hablar en verso, como no lo entendía, me daba notable pesadumbre, hasta que propuse de estudiar y aprender el modo, que me costó su trabajo, y aun enfado, a los principios, y, después de algunos meses, comencé a entender algo; y, con la aplicación y deseo de saberlo todo, después más, y estoy por decir que me costó más trabajo, sabiendo ya la lengua bisaya, el aprender este modo metafórico, y que sólo sirve para sus poesías, que el común de la lengua, aunque tan lata; y, a la verdad, poquísimos hay de los europeos ministros que lo entiendan, aunque lo oigan; rarísimo el que lo sabe imitar, y más con la agudeza y facilidad que algunos de ellos tienen en este modo poético; que hay algunos que de repente hablan en verso mejor que en prosa, y tal de los muy diestros estará muchas horas, y a veces una noche entera, que de noche usan más de estos

All this difference is shown in one and the same word by varying one letter or another. And in this way there are many words and a great variation among them due to changing, adding or supressing a single letter. May this suffice concerning its pronunciation.

Let us now come to their poetry, because even though [they do not have] the variety of metrical rhymes and assonance that we have, yet they also have rhymes, somewhat distinct from ours. There is no doubt that in these they are far ahead of us, because the language that they use in their poetry is very different in most of the words from those which they utilize in their ordinary and common conversation. This is so to such a degree that there are very few of the Europeans, even though they be very excellent linguists and know Bisayan very well, who understand their poetry or their rhythm even if they hear it. What more, besides being different as a rule, their rhythm regarding words and concepts even when they use ordinary words which perhaps accompany the poetry, all that they say in versè is so figurative that the entire thought is pure metaphor. One who does not understand know them finds it impossible to understand and them [i.e. the words].

It was more than five years since I had known this language with some depth; as often as I heard them speak in a poetic way and did not understand it, it caused me some considerable dismay, until I finally set myself to studying and learning its intricacies. This cost me much effort and even some irritation in the beginning; however, after several months I began to understand some of it; with a firmer desire to learn and a greater application, I grasped more of it. I should even state that it cost me more work to learn this metaphorical mode, which is useful only in poetry, than to learn this language itself even though it is so extensive. In truth, few are the European missionaries who understand it even though they do hear it. Rare is he who knows how to duplicate it, especially with the subtlety and facility which some of them possess with regard to this poetic form; there are some who speak spontaneously in verse better than in prose. Some of the more skillfull are capable of speaking in this manner for many hours and oftentimes throughout the entire night – for they use this form of entertainment mostly at night. They speak without hesitating for a letter or without searching for a word with notable

entretenimientos hablando, sin faltarles letra ni mendigar palabra, con notable abundancia, facilidad y agudez, y tanta que si no es quien lo entiende bien, no podrá hacer concepto de ello.

Sus modos de poesías varios, y según su variedad y las materias de que tratan, tienen sus nombres y calidades: el más vulgar y común a chicos y grandes, a hombres y mujeres, y que es el más fácil, llaman: *Ambahan*⁴, y es un modo de cantinelas, que cada uno consta de dos versos sueltos, cada uno de siete sílabas; pero en ellos dos se ha de acabar el sentido y la sentencia de lo que se dice; y, aunque en este modo usan pocas metáforas y se valen de las palabras comunes, tiene su dificultad el ajustar a tan breves palabras una razón o sentencia, sin que pueda pasar al tercer verso el sentido; y tiene, a más de esto, otra calidad que, trocando los dos versos y poniendo en segundo lugar el primero y el primero en segundo, han de hacer siempre el mismo sentido, y la sentencia ha de ser la misma, que no es tan fácil, como fuera si no hubiera dichas variaciones.

De este modo de *ambahanes* usan en sus cantos por entretenimiento y fiesta, con varias tonadas y puntos apacibles, cantando el que la hace o repite, de muchas que tienen hechas, solo, y repitiendo los demás todos juntos, trastocando en algunas tonadas los versos, como decíamos, en otras, no; y éste es el modo más fácil, más ordinario y usado, y que saben casi todos, grandes y chicos.

En este modo de poesía tienen uno que llaman *bikal*⁵; y aunque el metro es el mismo, y de los versos sueltos con su sonancia [*sic*] lo usan entre dos, o dos hombres o dos mujeres; y están respondiendo al compás y sin tardanza una y dos horas, diciéndose todo cuanto quieren (es modo satírico), y sacándose a plaza cuantas faltas tienen, o corporales que es lo más común, o morales, cuando no son de deshonor, con mucha risa y chacota y con aplauso de los que los oyen, que tal vez ayudan unos al

fluency, facility and keenness in such a manner that, unless it is someone who understands it well, one will be unable to catch the idea.

They have several types of poetry which have their names and characteristics according to their variety and the subject-matter which they treat. The most common and popular among the young and the elderly, for the men and for the women, and one which is the most simple, is called the *ambahan*.⁴ It is a kind of a ballad and consists of two blank verses, each one of seven syllables; both of them, however, must fully express the meaning and the concept of what is being said. Even though in this type of poetry they use few metaphors and make use of ordinary words, the meaning must be fully expressed in the first two verses, and the third one will express a new meaning. What more, it has another quality; namely, interchanging the verses by placing the first in the second place, and the second in the first place, they must always make the same sense, and the concept has to be the same, which is not as easy as it would seem, were it not for these variations.

They use this type of *ambahan* in their songs as an entertainment and for *fiestas* with a variety of melodies and singing in pleasant pitches. The one who composes or repeats from among the many that they have made [does this] alone, with the rest repeating altogether, interchanging some melodies in the verses, as we have said, in others not. This is the easiest way, the most common, the usual way and the one which almost all of them, young and elderly are familiar with.

In this type of poetry they have one which they call *Bikal*,⁵ where the rhythm is the same and the loose verses, that is, these without any rhythm are used alternately by two persons, either two men or two women and they converse with each other in strict musical rhythm and without the slightest pause for one or two hours, saying to each other anything they wish (in a satiric fashion), and making public whatever faults they have, either physical (which is more common) or moral, when these do not detract from someone's reputation. [This takes place] with much laughter, noisy mirth and with the applause of those who are listening. Some side with the one, while others with the other, to

uno, otros al otro. Es de entretenimiento y deporte suyo; y, acabado el *bikal* y la fiesta, se queda allí todo, sin que de las picazones y faltas que se dijeron se haga caso alguno.

Otro modo es el que llaman *Balak*⁶; éste, aunque es en el mismo metro, es empero muy metafórico, y es siempre entre un hombre y una mujer, y lo más común de cosas amatorias, usando de dos maneras: o en voz, respondiéndose y replicando cosas amatorias, que de esto suelen más que de cosas buenas, con notable agudeza y prontitud, y todas malas; o en dos instrumentos, que llaman *kuriapi*⁷ al del hombre, y *kurlong*⁸ al de la mujer (cuando trataremos de sus músicas, diremos cuáles son), y en ellos se hablan y responden en la materia cuanto quieren; y en este modo con más seguridad, porque no todos lo saben tener en ellos, ni llegan a entenderlo tanto como cuando son con la boca. Es cosa notable ésta, y que no sabemos de otra nación del mundo que la use, ni sepa con dos instrumentos y harto fútiles, hablarse y responderse como ésta.

*Siday*⁹ llaman a otro género de poesía, y es el más difícil de todos, y lo usan, o para alabar a otros, o para cantar las hazañas de sus pasados, o las prendas o hermosura de alguna mujer u hombre muy valiente. Es difícil sobremanera de entender, y aun los mismos bisayas no lo entienden todos, porque no hay palabra que no sea metafórica y que no tenga diverso sentido en este metro; que fuera de él gustan mucho los bisayas de oírlo, y se están muchas horas, en especial de noche, sin bostezar ni dormirse, oyéndolos; y suelen pagar o regalar muy bien a los diestros en esta poesía para que vayan a sus casas a cantarlas; que todas ellas las dicen cantando.

Y yo confieso que de estos *siday*, me costó mucho trabajo el entenderlos y regalar no pocas veces a los más diestros en ellos para que delante de mí los cantasen. Sólo tienen algunas

the amusement of everyone. When the *Bikal* and the feast have ended, everything is forgotten, without any attention paid any longer to the little 'digs' or the faults which were spoken of.

Another type is one that is called *Balak*.⁶ Although this is in the same rhyme, it is, however, highly metaphorical. It is always between a man and a woman and most commonly about affairs of love. They employ it in two ways: either by means of words, answering or replying to each other about matters of love, usually all evil, because about these they know more than about good things, with remarkable wit and speed; or again, on two instruments. The one which is used by the man is called a *kuriapi*,⁷ [while that used by] a woman is called *kurlung*.⁸ When we come to discuss their music, we shall describe them, for on these they converse and respond to each other about the subject as much as they please. In this manner [it can be rendered] with greater confidentiality since not everyone knows how to express himself [on these instruments], nor do they receive the opportunity to understand it as well as when they [communicate] by word of mouth. This is an incredible achievement and we do not know of another nation in the world which uses nor knows how with two totally flimsy instruments to speak and respond as they do on these.

Still another type of poetry is called the *Siday*⁹ and it is the most difficult of all; they use it either to praise others or to chant about the heroic exploits of their ancestors; or about the qualities or beauty of some woman or about some courageous man. It is extremely difficult to understand, and not even the Bisayans themselves understand it, because there is not a word that is not metaphorical and that does not have a different meaning in this rhyme. Notwithstanding all this, the Bisayans still enjoy hearing it, and they spend many hours, especially at night, listening to it without any yawning or without falling asleep. They are drawn to pay or to reward very handsomely those who are skilled in this poetry, so that they may come to their houses and chant them – for all of these are narrated by way of singing.

I must acknowledge that when it comes to these *siday*, it cost me much effort to understand them; so that the more skillful ones would come and sing them in my presence, many times, I

repeticiones algo cansadas, porque vuelven a repetir muchas veces, con añadir sólo una, o dos palabras, muchas y muy largas razones; y tal vez no puede ser menos por pedirlos las materias que cuentan o cantan, y ser el modo tan difícil, como hemos dicho.

Haya es otro modo de poesía que usaban, y usan, para llorar sus muertos, y así llaman: *Parahaya*¹⁰, a las plañideras, que son mujeres que se alquilan para este efecto. El oficio de estas es cantar, con voz lamentable, endechas, mezclando alabanzas de los muertos o de sus antepasados; a que corresponden los parientes, marido o mujer del difunto, con unos alaridos desproporcionados; que éste es su modo de llorar muertos, sin derramar comúnmente ni una lágrima; pero de esto trataremos después cuando de sus costumbres; aquí sólo baste, para lo tocante a sus versos y poesías, esto que se usaba para los muertos, que también le llaman *anugun*¹¹ o *kanugon*¹², que es lo mismo que cosa lastimosa o mal lograda, etc.

Y, dejando otros nombres especiales de poesías, que los dichos son los más nobles, acabemos esta materia de ellas con la que llaman: *Awit*¹³, que quiere decir “cantar”, y es el que usan en las navegaciones, cantando siempre en ellas al son de los remos, que es lo que corresponde a las *zalomas* que nuestros marineros usan en el mar Mediterráneo; si bien estas de estos naturales son más, y tantas que son sinnúmero las tonadillas, o más apresuradas, que tienen para remar; siendo el alma de los remos un buen cantor que llaman, *Parawit*, en cualquiera embarcación, y los hay tan diestros que cantan días enteros sin faltarles qué; porque hay muchos cantares suyos hechos de sus antepasados para el efecto; y algunos, aunque difíciles de entender, también los más muy ingeniosos y metafóricos que los padres van enseñando a sus hijos, y algunos son tan fecundos en este género de poesía (es también de dos versos sueltos la copla, teniendo uno que es como estribillo corto de dos palabras o tres, no más, que repiten todos) que de repente cantan sin faltarles materia en algunas horas.

had to favor them with gifts. They also have certain repetitions, somewhat tedious, which they sing endlessly and where they add only one or two words and [which they intersperse] with many and lengthy accounts. Perhaps, this cannot be otherwise because the subject-matter they tell or sing about demands it. This type, then, is most difficult as we have already said.

There is another type of poetry which they used and still utilize in mourning their deceased, and this they call *parahaya*.¹⁰ [This is rendered by] the mourners, women who hire themselves out for this purpose. The task of these is to chant dirges in a mournful tempo mingling in praises about the deceased or about their ancestors to which the relatives, the husband or the wife of the deceased, intervene with some unbecoming howling. This is their way in weeping for their dead without ordinarily shedding a single teardrop. But about this, we shall treat later when we [discuss] their customs. Here it is sufficient to mention only what pertains to their verses and poetry, the one used for the dead which is also called *anugon*¹¹ or *kanugon*¹² which, in turn, is the same as 'regrettable' or 'lamentable' situation, etc.

Omitting [their] other special types of poetry, of which those mentioned are the most outstanding, we shall terminate this subject with one they call *awit*¹³ and which means 'to sing'; this is one which they utilize in the course of their sailings, always singing to the rhythm of the oars. This is what corresponds to the *Zalomas* which our sailors use on the Mediterranean. However, those of these natives are more numerous; all these little tunes are countless and are sung either very slowly or more rapidly depending upon the speed of rowing. The spirit behind the oars is an excellent singer whom they call the *parawit*. There are some who are so skillful that they chant the whole day without faltering. Many of their songs were composed by their ancestors for this purpose; some of which are extremely difficult to understand. A majority of them are also very ingenious and metaphorical which the fathers constantly teach their sons. Some are so prolific in this type of poetry. The couplet also consists of two verses, having one which is like a short refrain and consists of two or three words, no more, which all repeat that they sing it fluently for hours at a time without running out of material.

Sola una licencia tiene este canto de los navíos, y es que se puede partir la palabra por no alargar el verso, poniendo una sílaba del principio en el primer verso y prosiguiendo la otra u otras en el siguiente; y, ni tampoco se pide tan puntual la sentencia como en los otros, que facilita algo más su duración; facultad necesaria para uno que juntamente usa de la voz, entonando, y de las manos, remando, sirviendo de compás su voz, y las tonadillas de apresurarse o detenerse más en el movimiento de los remos, que entretienen no poco las continuas y penosas navegaciones con que andamos continuamente los ministros del Evangelio, ocupados y aun molestados, entre estos naturales bisayas, como veremos en su lugar cuando se trate del ministerio en común.

Acabemos este capítulo con los caracteres de estos naturales, o, por mejor decir, de que usan de pocos años a esta parte, enseñanza que se les comunicó de los tagalos, y estos aprendieron de los burneyes que vinieron de su gran isla de Bornei a la de Manila, con quien tenían trato considerable; y con él les pegaron a los tagalos la maldita secta de Mahoma mucho antes que acá llegasen los españoles y les trajesen el verdadero conocimiento de Dios y de su santa fe.

De estos burneyes aprendieron los tagalos sus caracteres; y de éstos, los bisayas. Y por esto les llaman caracteres o letras de “Moro”, pues los moros se las enseñaron; y, aunque no llegó a los bisayas o no admitieron la maldita secta, aprendieron sus letras que hoy usan muchos, y las mujeres mucho más que los hombres, que ellas escriben y leen más corrientemente y mejor que ellos. Son, pues, las letras estas.

a	ʔ	b	o	c	ɸ	d	ɹ	g	ɳ
h	ʌ	l	ɛ	m	ʋ	n	ɸ	p	ʔ
y	ʌ	s	ʌ	t	ɸ	nga	ɳ	10	

Only one poetical license is allowed in these boat-songs; namely, that a word can be divided so as not to lengthen the verse, by placing a syllable which begins the word in the first line and by placing the other or others in the following one. Nor is it necessary that the sentence be so exact as the others, for this somewhat facilitates its interval, a necessary arrangement for one who jointly uses the voice for intoning and the hands for rowing. His voice serves as a 'compass' and the brief songs are used to speedup or slowdown the movement of the oars. [All this provides] no little relief in the constant and tormenting navigations in which we, the ministers of the Gospel, are continually engaged and even troubled with [while being] among these native Bisayans, as we shall see in its place when we come to treat about the ministry as a whole.

Let us bring this chapter to a conclusion with the letters of these Bisayans, or to put it better, those which they have used for the past several years until now – a skill which was communicated to them by the Tagalogs who, in turn, had learned it from the Borneans. These came from the Island of Borneo to Manila, for they had considerable trade with them; together with this, they infected the Tagalogs with the evil sect of Mohammed long before the Spaniards arrived here. [It was the latter] who brought them the true knowledge of God and about His Holy Faith.

The Tagalogs learned their characters from the Borneans and the Bisayans from the Tagalogs. This is why they call these letters or characters '*Moro*' [characters], because the *Moros* taught these to them. Although they never came to the Bisayas, or they did not admit this accursed sect, they learned their letters. Today they are widely used, and by the women more than by the men. The former read and write them more fluently than the latter. These are, then, the following letters:

a	ʔ	b	o	c	ɸ	d	ɿ	g	ɲ
h	ʍ	l	ɛ	m	ʋ	n	ɸ	p	ʔ
y	ɣ	s	ʌ	t	ʎ	nga	ɳ		

Todas estas letras, o caracteres, sin punto alguno, suenan con *a*, v.g., *ba*, *da*, *ga*, etc., y poniéndoles encima un punto suenan *i* o *e*, y, si se pone abajo, suenan *o* o *u*:

ba o	be ó	bu u	ca ƒ	ci í
co ƒ				

de modo que no usan de letras vocales o comienzan por vocal; ni tampoco de letras consonantes, o intermedias, o finales, porque, cuando hay dos consonantes, excepto en la letra *nga*¹⁵, lo que no hiere se *supple*. Y lo mismo es en todas las finales, de modo que se puede decir que su leer es adivinar más que pronunciar lo escrito, que los que no están diestros en suplir las consonantes que algunos, y más las mujeres, leen con destreza y sin tropezar, van marcando cuanto leen y adivinando, y aun errando más que acertando; y por esta causa, aunque es fácil de aprender su modo de escribir, es muy difícil el leer, porque, como hemos dicho, lo más es suplir. Y así, para más claridad tras cada palabra suelen poner estas dos rayas qua sirven de distinguir las palabras y de hacer más fácil la lectura; que, siendo seguido todo y sin estas divisiones, aunque algunos escriben sin ellas, se confundieran mucho más.

Antiguamente escribían esos indios como los chinos y japones, de arriba abajo, comenzando al revés desde la mano derecha hacia la alto, y luego sus líneas de abajo a arriba hasta acabar en la mano izquierda por donde nosotros comenzamos; pero hoy ya comienzan como nosotros, y van haciendo sus líneas a nuestro modo, de la mano izquierda a la derecha, llenando toda la plana, como nosotros.

All the letters, or characters without any dot are sounded with an *a*, that is, *ba*, *da*, *ga*, etc. When the dot is placed above them, they are sounded with an *i* or *e*; and when it is placed below, they are sounded with an *o* or a *u*:

ba o	be ō	bu ȯ	ca ƒ	ci ƒ̇
 co ƒ̇				

As a result, they do not employ vowel characters, except when two vowels come together, or [when the words] begin with a vowel. Nor [do they use] consonants whether intermediate or final because when there are two consonants, except in the particle *NG*,¹⁵ whatever is not expressed is implied. Similarly with all the final letters in such a way that one may say that their reading consists in guessing rather than in pronouncing what is actually written. Those who are not skillful in supplying the consonants which some, especially women, read with proficiency and without stumbling and go on adroitly reading and guessing it – more often erring than rendering it properly. For this reason, even though it is easy to learn their way of writing, it is very difficult to read it because as we have said, most of it [i.e. the characters which are not expressed] must be [quickly] supplied [by the reader]. Thus, for greater clarity, they are accustomed to place after each word these two lines which serve to distinguish the words and thus make the reading easier. And if all were to be continuous and without these separations [although some write without them] they would be still more confusing.

In ancient times, these natives used to write like the Chinese and Japanese, [that is] from top to bottom, commencing contrariwise from the right and upwards. Then their line went from the bottom to the top until they ended on the left hand side where we commence. But now, they already begin as we do, and make their lines as we do from the left hand to the right filling in the entire page as we do. □

Chapter 2

ANNOTATIONS

[1] As the Bisayans, so too our classic compilers of the Bisayan dictionaries. They too made their entries sometimes under *d*, or *l*, or *r*. Hence, searching for a word with one of these letters one must always check all three possibilities which is extremely time-consuming.

[2] Certain areas on the Island of Samar and a portion of Leyte, utilize the 'R' in speech and in writing. Most prefer the 'd' or 'l' which are softer and not as harsh as the 'r'.

[3] Alcina uses the letter 'c'; the editors of the manuscript opt to use the letter "K" which is a true Bisayan letter in their alphabet and has basis in the Malayan alphabet. Again, a reminder to the reader that the editors are using the Bisayan alphabet in all Bisayan words, terms and phrases in lieu of the hispanization of so many.

[4] *Ambahan*. Also *Amban* [to add what is short], a short poetic composition or a ballad. "Chant, verse, song." Under the Bisayan term *Biyaw*: to sing alone, without response, we find a host of poetic compositions presented by Sánchez [1711]: *Kandu*, *balak*, *siday*, *dayhuan*, *gural*, *haya*, *kanugun*, *sinanduy*, *biyaw*, *awit*, *uman*, *ambahan*. "Various ways of chanting and of telling their stories, called *biriwayan*." De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914], *op. cit.*, pp. 15 and 97.

Perhaps, it would be profitable to define some of the above terms:

[a] *Kandu*: A poem or a song which either chants or relates some ancient history of the Bisayans. De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914], *op. cit.*, p. 83.

Sánchez describes it as a poem or a song with which one chants one's histories. The cantor is known as *Parakandu* and the piece chanted as *karanduun*. *Op. cit.*

[b] *Balak* or *Balag*: "they are songs chanted in their drinking sessions and in their work." Sánchez, *op. cit.*

De la Rosa-Alcázar simply give this entry: "song, verse, chant." *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

[c] *Siday*: will be treated below, in the text.

[d] *Dayhuan*: "A song usually sung/chanted when they drink, and at some other festivities." The one who sings or composes these is known as *darayhuan*, *parayhuan*, *dayhuanan*.

"*Dayhuan*: A Bisayan song; chanted when drinking or at other occasions." De la Rosa-Alcázar, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[e] *Gural*: A song or songs of the Bisayans. *Nagugural*, *ngaawit*. *Guguralun*, *arawitun*. *Guguralan*, the one who does it, *paragural*, *paraawit*, the cantor." Sánchez, *op. cit.*

[f] *Haya*: the word simply means 'to weep for the dead' according to Sánchez [1711] and 'to weep' according to De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914].

[g] *Kanugun*: simply means 'sorrow, regret'. "*Kanugun* or *Anugun*: to weep or to pay honors to the deceased or better to say to chant something that must be prohibited, because in this song they invoke the spirits and also the *diwata*'." Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

[h] *Sinanduy*: derived from *sanday*: "to challenge, to provoke." To incite, to excite, to provoke; "to incite a person to do something." De la Rosa-Alcázar, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

[i] *Biyaw*: "to sing alone without any response. – *Parabiyaw*, the one who sing thus. De la Rosa-Alcázar, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[j] *Uman*: it is like the *kandu*; story.

[5] *Bikal* or *Bikalun*, *biklun*: the meaning of the word is "to provoke, to incite"; the same as *bulaw* or *ayat*. Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

[6] This *balak* is a poetic piece, verses or a song. To compose or sing in verses. De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914], *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Poetic compositions customarily sung during drinking sprees or while working. Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

[7] *Kuriapi*. Also *kudyapi*, *kutiapi*, *kutsapi*; a musical instrument; guitar. Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

De la Rosa-Alcázar give a similar entry under "*Kutsapi*: guitarra, – to play it." *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

In 1910, in the monthly magazine entitled *Cultura Filipina*, there appeared an interesting article on the *Kuriapi* by a certain Fernando Canon. He writes that the *kuriapi* is a typically Filipino musical instrument: Is there anything as simple as the *kundiman*. The *kumintang* and the *balitwa*? They are short sentences: Congatulaions sights. Complaints. It is the same, for as long as it touches us deeply. It is the predilect modulated voice of the *kuriapi*, the most ancient Filipino guitar. There is a clear proof of our natural culture when changing our mute sentences of great esthetic feeling.

This is the esthetic flame, the great legend that Rizal made great when he recovered from the archives of the British Museum, thus making Pigafetta's. Cfr. *Cultura Filipina*, Manila, 1914, pp. 121-122 and p. 88.

They used in their feasts certain pastoral instruments with cords, which ordinarily were of the hair of the owner of the instrument. They also had a kind of a guitar with metal chord called *kuriapi*, played like the *bandurrias*, with a feather. Manuel Artigas y Cuerva, *Reseña de la Provincia de Leyte: Estudio*

Histórico Bio-Bibliográfico {*Cultura Filipina*, Manila: 1914}, pp. 121-122 and p. 88. The citation from Canon, is from *Cultura Filipina*, No. 1, Abril de 1910.

[8] *Kurlong* or *kudlung*: a musical instrument proper only to women. It is made of strong and hard bamboo. *Panlugi*, is called to cut and make those kind of chords from the back. *Panlugii itun akun kudlung*. Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

“*Kudlung*: A woman’s musical instrument.” De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914], *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[9] This *siday* is one of the most simple poetic forms: A verse, a group of words subject to measure and harmony according to fixed and determined rules to make or compose verses. To put in verses. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

[10] The word *haya* in Bisaya means ‘to weep for the dead’; *parahaya* is the one doing the weeping. *Hahaya an minatay*. Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

[11] The same as *kanugun*: sorrow, compassion, regret. De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914], *op. cit.*, p. 84.

[12] *Kanugoy* or *Anugun*, *kaamad*, *kakara*. Sorrow or regret but especially: “it means to cry for their dead, or better to say, to chant something that ought to be prohibited, because through this chant they invoke or the *diwata*.” Sánchez [1711], *op. cit.*

[13] The word *awit* means to sing; the one who sings is called *paraawit*. *Ibid.*

“*Auit*: to chant happy things. – Chant,” happy tunes. De la Rosa-Alcázar [1914], *op. cit.*, p. 19-20. It would be well to note that Father Alcina does a marvelous job in describing the ancient practices in such great detail. One can draw-up a lexicon of Bisayan words very readily from his *Historia*, as the Meras-Higueras attempted in their work, cited in the Introduction to our edition.

[14] Rather than entering here, in script, Alcina’s examples, the editors opt to present, first Father Domingo Ezguerra’s summary and presentation found in his Bisayan *Arte*, in 1747. Then followed by a comparative presentation prepared by one of these editors of Alcina.

[15] *Ng*. See Chapter 1 of this Book 3, annotation # 15; it explores the *nga*, *ng* in its various dimensions.