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PHILIPPINE POETRY AND TRANSLATION: A GENERAL SURVEY

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When the Tagalog Good News Bible (*Magandang Balita Biblia*) was published in 1980, one of the initial reactions was that of general pleasure at the use of normal forms of Philippine poetry where such forms were called for. Principles of dynamic equivalence provided enough freedom of word choice and of structure so that poetry could have appropriate equivalence of meaning and impact. It may be useful to reexamine the material with as critical an eye as possible, to determine both strengths and weaknesses in the translated poetic material.¹

This study touches upon a wide range of poetic features, any one of which deserves a more comprehensive treatment. We will first look at some features of Philippine poetry before reviewing samples from the Tagalog *Magandang Balita Biblia*.

Formal Structure of Classical Poetry

A simple introduction into the formal nature of Philippine poetry can be accomplished by showing some details of the first stanza of the classical Tagalog poem, *Florante at Laura* [Florante and Laura], by Francisco Baltasar, who is also known by his pen name, "Balagtas." A good number of languages in the Philippines have lengthy poems passed on orally from one generation to the next, and these have been referred to as "epics." Herrera informs me, however, that some critics do not consider the Balagtas classic as an epic in the true sense of the word. The name *Florante* is related to the Spanish verb meaning to blossom or to flower and is derived from the Latin *plorare*, to weep, lament. This relates to the

¹ On earlier drafts of this paper I received help and information from the following people, to whom I extend my thanks: Noel D. Osborn, UBS Translation Consultant working with the Philippine Bible Society; Ruel F. Pepa, coordinator of the Tagalog Old Testament revision; and Regalada A. Herrera, teacher, and formerly on the staff of the Translation Department, Lutheran Church in the Philippines.

hero's own explanation later in the poem, where he explains the origin of his name. The opening stanza is as follows:

*Sa isáng madilím / gúbat na mapanglâw,
dâwag na matiník / ay waláng pagítan,
hálos naghíhirap / ang kay Pébong sílang
dumálaw sa loób / na lubháng masúkal.*

A somewhat formal-correspondent translation:

In a dark / forest that is gloomy
the vines, thorny, / have no space [for squeezing] between,
[so that] it is almost difficult / [even] for rising Phoebus [the sun god]
to visit the interior / that is so very cluttered.

Some initial observations:

This stanza has twelve syllables per line, with the line regularly divided in the middle (as indicated above by the “ / ”). Other poems that follow classical form regularly have an even number of syllables per line, and the lines can be rather long, with eighteen or more syllables. The divisions do not necessarily divide the line precisely in half as they do here, but they regularly occur at the same point in the line, with an even number of syllables in each half. (Note that these observations on counting syllables apply only to that poetry which attempts to imitate the classical form, especially that of Balagtas.)

Rhyming follows a strict pattern in the Balagtas epic. Each stanza follows its own rhyming pattern that appears only at the end of every line (not at the middle point), all final syllables rhyming with each other, and no two adjacent stanzas use the same set of rhyming syllables. Rhyming rules in all Philippine languages we have examined are as follows:

Syllables that rhyme with each other must have identical vowels.

The syllables that rhyme with each other must all be vowel-final or all consonant-final.

Vowel-final syllables must all either

- (i) end in a glottal stop (normally not written, although phonemically significant); e.g., *wiká* “language”, *basá* “wet”, and *paksá* “topic”; or
- (ii) end without a glottal stop; e.g., *halina* “come” and *bumása* “read”.

Consonant-final syllables must all be either

- (iii) voiced continuants; e.g., the endings *-an*, *-al*, *-aw*, *-ay*; or
- (iv) stops, or the voiceless *s*; e.g., the endings *-ad*, *-at*, *-as*, *-ap*.

There are, therefore, four possible rhyming sets multiplied by the number of vowels in a given language. It has been surprising to find local poets who never realized that this was the rhyming pattern of their language, yet they adhered to it perfectly.

Stressed syllables are here indicated by accent marks, and in this

poem they occur at the rate of two per half line, but within each half line they can occur in any position. This feature of stress is important to remember when poems are sung to rhythmic music. Tagalog is spoken with a fairly level pitch maintained during a given clause, and stress is a matter of loudness without varying the pitch. Somehow this has meant that rhythmic stresses in sung music do not need to match spoken stresses. The only caveat is that ambiguities may occur occasionally, in which the sung stress may signal a similar word form with a different meaning; e.g., *bumása* "to read" and *bumasá* "to become wet". The first two lines of the popular folk song "Bahay Kubo" demonstrate how spoken stress need not coincide with sung stress; here the sung stresses are underlined while the spoken stresses are accented:

*Báhay kúbo, káhit muntí,
Ang haláman doón ay sàri-sàri . . .*

In terms of language structure, the above stanza of classical poetry uses a word order and sentence structure that is normal for standard prose, and this feature is common in Tagalog poetry. However, certain enclitics can be dropped, but only at the beginning of a line or of a half line. For example, the ligature *na* is implied at the beginning of the second half of line 1, and the case marker *ang* is implied at the beginning of line 2. Again, it cannot be stated that this pattern is adhered to by all modern poets.

In terms of content, the poem has devices commonly used in the poetry of other cultures. It establishes a gloomy setting, almost chaotic, from the beginning. Other stanzas will reveal figurative language and similar devices anticipated in poetry. One can see already in the first stanza that Balagtas has borrowed a classical Greek image that was filtered through his Spanish education as he refers to the sun god in the third line. The rays of the sun that cannot penetrate the forest are spoken of figuratively as the impeded visit of Phoebus². This borrowed feature from western culture is important to note, for it signals the readiness of the Tagalog culture to adopt foreign features and adapt them so that they fit into the local culture.

Tagalog poetry in general appears to follow a system of poetic rules more closely than do certain other Philippine languages with regard to their respective traditions of poetry. For example, the life and death of Jesus Christ has been set to poetic form in several of the major languages, and these lengthy poems are sung or chanted in homes and in communities during the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. The Tagalog *Kasaysayan ng Pasiong Mahal ni Hesukristong Panginoon Natin* "Narrative of the Precious Passion of Jesus Christ Our Lord" is composed of five-line stanzas throughout, the lines of each stanza consisting of eight syllables, with all lines rhyming with each other on their final syllables, and no adjacent stanzas employing the identical set of rhyming syllables. In the Cebuano version there is more freedom, as one stanza may have a rhyming pattern of A-A-B-B-B, A-B-A-B-A, A-B-A-C-A, and so forth, or all lines may rhyme with each other. Not only may the various patterns

² My impression is that no formal identification of the sun with a deity is common in the various folk traditions of the Philippines, although personification may occur in certain tales.

exist within one poem, but adjacent stanzas may share the same rhyming set of syllables or the same rhyming pattern. This feature gives Cebuano hymn writers, for example, greater freedom within which to work.

As to the number of syllables per line, Cebuano poetry appears to be quite regular, as is true of Tagalog. However, the poetry and songs of certain language groups in the mountains of northern Luzon demonstrate freedom in this regard. For example, if the regular beat of a song calls for eleven syllables per line, in some songs relatively few lines will adhere to this requirement. Shorter lines will have some syllables carried over two musical notes or beats, while longer lines will be adjusted by having two syllables sung where only one is normal. And the practice appears to be quite acceptable. All of these variations cause one to question whether the language groups more influenced by western culture have correspondingly regularized their indigenous poetic patterns, or whether such strict regularization preceded the arrival of westerners. We may never know.

An Example of Modern Poetry

By contrast with the classical style, we find modern, popular poetry to be quite flexible. The following poem by Ronnie M. Halos appeared in the weekly magazine *Liwayway* (October 28, 1985), page 32:

MGA ANAY SA HALIGI		TERMITES IN THE SUPPORT-POSTS
line	rhyme syll	
1 <i>Nabaghan si Tata Gustin</i>	A	8 Daddy Gustin was surprised
2 <i>isang umaga nang kanyang mapansin</i>	A	11 one morning when he noticed
3 <i>na may mga anay na namahay</i>	B	10 there were termites residing
4 <i>sa haligi ng kanyang bahay.</i>	B	9 in the support-posts of his house.
<hr/>		
5 <i>Mapuputi at manilaw-nilaw</i>	B'	10 Somewhat white and yellow
6 <i>ang mga anay na iyon</i>	C	8 were those termites
7 <i>na ang mga ngipin</i>	A	6 whose teeth
8 <i>ay kumikinang.</i>	B'	5 were sparkling.
<hr/>		
9 <i>Si Tata Gustin ay nag-isip</i>	D	9 Daddy Gustin pondered
10 <i>at biglang nagulumihanan</i>	B''	9 and suddenly was perplexed
11 <i>ngayong nasinop na niya</i>	E	8 now that he had fixed up
12 <i>ang kanyang bahay</i>	B''	5 his house
13 <i>ay saka naman may tatampalasan.</i>	B''	11 there was, in turn, a destroyer.
<hr/>		
14 <i>Si Tata Gustin bagamat may poot</i>	F	11 Daddy Gustin, although angry,
15 <i>ay di makasigaw</i>	B	6 could not shout
16 <i>bagkus ay napaiyak,</i>	G	7 but only cried,
17 <i>ang sugat sa kanyang dibdib</i>	D	8 the wound in his breast
18 <i>ay nagdurigo at nagnanaknak . . .</i>	G	10 was bleeding and infected . . .
<hr/>		
19 <i>Alam ni Tata Gustin</i>	A	7 Daddy Gustin knew
20 <i>bukas ay darami pa ang mga anay,</i>	B'''	12 tomorrow the termites will multiply further,
21 <i>bukas din ay hindi niya alam</i>	B'''	10 and also tomorrow he will not know
22 <i>ang kanyang kinabukasan.</i>	B'''	8 his tomorrow [his future].

In the center column, after each line, the rhyming pattern is shown. Prime markers show the same rhyming set of syllables used in separate subsequent patterns. Upon first inspection there seems to be no real pattern except for several instances that appear *ad hoc*, and if so, restricted to individual sentences of the poem. I have added lines to mark off the sentences from one another, in order to identify possible patterns. The first four lines seem to follow a common pattern seen in poetry. The second sentence, lines 5-8, rhymes on its first and last lines; the third sentence, 9-13, rhymes on its second, fourth, and fifth lines; the fourth sentence, 14-18, rhymes on its third and fifth lines; and the last sentence rhymes on all but its first line. (Pepa agrees that lines 21 and 22 rhyme, but he feels that the rhyming of line 20 with the last two is latent.) The first and last sentences in particular seem to have a pattern of clear rhyming, readily recognized by the hearer. One wonders if a kind of closure is exercised here – one not involving chiasmus, however. Also, the term *bukas* is used skillfully in each of the last three lines as a play on words, and these three lines rhyme with each other; whether this correlation is significant is something that should be investigated.

The poem does not seem to have been prepared for singing, or at least not for use with a melody with even lines; the number of syllables varies considerably from line to line. However, Pepa reminds me that “free-verse poems like this are the favorite of modern Tagalog rock-and-roll (‘soft’ rock, to be specific) musicians/singers,” and so we can’t be sure if this was intended for singing. In any case, one wonders if the poet used shorter lines, possibly spoken more slowly, to give dramatic emphasis, especially toward the end of the poem.

It will be noted here and in the following examples that we do not pay attention to the number of accented syllables per line. This was certainly an important feature in the classical style of Balagtas. Some today continue to believe that this is an important feature, as Pepa reminds me. However, in our earlier studies it seemed that this feature was among the first to be abandoned as poetry moved into other forms. Perhaps this question should be reviewed by people working in the region.

What is the general meaning of the poem? We asked an assembled group of translation reviewers from several language areas whether this poem is about termites. They responded with a resounding “No!” The poem appeared during the last months of the Marcos administration, and so it could be thought of as a reflection on the political situation. However, we suspect that this poem could be resurrected under different circumstances and applied in a completely different manner – also without reference to termites.

Other Poetic Forms

For integration of poetic forms into Bible translation, it is important to note the traditions of proverbs and riddles set to poetry. Some believe that these forms were close to the life of the people and that they developed earlier, so that the forms of longer poems really have their roots in these shorter forms.

The Tagalog riddle is regularly composed of two rhyming lines, equal in length. Two images are presented to the hearer, usually contrasting images or even conflicting ones. For example:

Munting dagat-dagatan
Binabakor ng danglay.
 'A tiny little lake
 fenced with bamboo strips.'

Fish traps formed of bamboo strips are normally inside a lake, not surrounding it. The answer to the riddle is the human eye, with its eyelashes that surround it. Another example:

Bumbong kung liwanag
Kung gabi ay dagat.
 'A bamboo tube by daylight
 at night a sea.'

The mat for sleeping is rolled up by day so that it looks like a large bamboo tube, but at night it is wide and flat, like the surface of the sea.

It will be noted that both riddles have their own rhyme. The first consists of two seven-syllable lines, while the second consists of two six-syllable lines. Comparison with riddle patterns from other language groups indicates that such a pattern is in common use in many areas of the Philippines. It seems that the challenge of the riddle is enhanced by the paucity of words, so that the number of hints toward a solution are kept to a minimum.

The Tagalog proverb in form follows the same pattern as the riddle; in fact, a proverb doesn't strike one as a proverb if it is not set in such a pattern. An example:

Nuti ang gumamela
nula ang sampaguita.
 'The hibiscus turns white;
 the jasmine turns red.'

Since the normal color of these two flowers is the reverse, this proverb in essence warns us to beware of Murphy's law! Thus are the fortunes of mankind – completely unexpected reversal. Another example:

Ubos, ubos biyaya
Bukas nama'y tunganga.
 'Use up, use up what is granted
 Tomorrow, then, the mouth hangs open.'

This proverb reminds those who have material blessings today not to squander them, lest they be left open-mouthed tomorrow with nothing. A third example shows how certain proverbial themes are repeated across the globe:

*Ipinakataas-taas;
dumagundong nang lumagpak.*
'It was raised to a great height;
it made a resounding noise when it fell.'

We would say "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

Again, the three proverbs follow the same formal structure as the riddles, namely, that the two lines are equal in number of syllables, and each pair rhymes on the final syllable. The first two have seven syllables per line, while the last has eight. An economy of words is used, as in the riddle, and perhaps this feature helps people remember the proverb. The terseness also seems to emphasize the simplicity and clarity of principles that hold true for proper living.

Balagtasán. One more form of Tagalog poetry must be mentioned, namely, the *Balagtasán*, a spontaneous debate in which two contestants must argue their points strictly within the accepted forms of Tagalog poetry. A third poet is involved, a kind of middleman, who serves as referee and judge, and who, also in poetic style, introduces the topic and the contestants. In the end he usually does not state who won the debate (that would be impolite), but he suggests that each party had valid things to say, and we should all go home and think it over. Some features of this form have counterparts in the book of Job, where Job debates with his three friends (thus involving more than the two protagonists of the *Balagtasán*), and where Elihu appears out of nowhere and says nothing, really, beyond recapitulating what has been said; he seems merely to serve as a bridge between the debates of the men and the speeches of Yahweh.

The *Balagtasán* may eventually die out if people do not grow up in an environment where they are stimulated by this intellectual pastime. However, it is apparent that the form continues to be appreciated. One missionary told me how he had just arrived via jeepney at the public square of a large rural town where some Christian evangelists had arranged for such an expert in spontaneous Tagalog poetry to address the public in that medium. The jeepney driver's attention was captured immediately by what he heard, and he didn't even pay attention to the payment the missionary was counting out into his hand. The Christian message apparently was heard more intently than would have been the case otherwise.

"Doggerel"

The Random House dictionary defines doggerel as "(of verse) comic or burlesque, and usually loose or irregular in measure." Ogden Nash has proven that the English-reading public enjoys doggerel when it is used for comic purposes. Something similar is happening in the Philippines today, as demonstrated by clippings sent to me by Herrera, in which verse is used for humorous purposes. Here is an excerpt from a contribution by a reader to *Sports Flash*, June 14-20, 1990, in which he discusses certain basketball players:

*Kung point guard ang pag-uusapan
Walang panama si Calma or Jaworski diyan
Maging sa assist or steal ay talagang maaasahan
Pati sa rebound kay Gray lumalaban*

We won't bother with a technical description or translation, but one can see how English and Tagalog are mixed, and that is all part of the humor of this one verse taken from a longer poem. The point is that translators should be aware of what makes for doggerel, chiefly so that such features do not by accident creep into what is supposed to be serious biblical text. Sometimes there may be a contraction that is normal elsewhere but should not be found in the best poetry, or there may be the misuse of a figure of speech, or the forced twisting of sentence structure to fit a required format. Pepa uses the term "inelegant" to designate something that somehow does not seem appropriate, and it is a good term. However, we need to define as clearly as possible what is covered by "inelegant" in the poetry of a given language. There are people who believe in all sincerity that they are producing proper poetry, when in fact it is doggerel. It helps if one can deal with such problems objectively, on the basis of stated principles, so that the often-fragile feelings of the poet will not suffer unnecessary injury when the poem is rejected.

There is much more to Tagalog poetry, and to Philippine poetry in general, than has been presented in these few lines. However, the above information may serve as sufficient background to demonstrate forms available for use in the Tagalog Bible translation. It is especially important to note that rules exist, but that these rules are bent frequently in common practice. It is also important to note that certain nonindigenous forms and concepts can be borrowed effectively. It may be difficult to determine what can not be borrowed, but this task is also important. In any case, as is true of Hebrew poetry, there is a great variety of forms and devices available to the poet, and one never knows from poem to poem what to expect next.

It is my impression that characteristics of Hebrew poetry such as parallelism and chiasmus are not indigenous features of Philippine poetry, and Pepa supports this impression. Any parallelism that occurs is the result of translation and does not arise from any feature of Tagalog poetry. In fact, the Kugel/Alter concept of the second line serving as a further development of the first line has not been noted as indigenous or significant in Tagalog. Similarly, no chiastic structures have been noted in indigenous poetry, and therefore, if they occur in translation, the receptor will be conscious of neither their presence nor their significance.

Poetry in the Tagalog Bible

Riddles and proverbs. Samson's riddle, Judges 14.14, makes an interesting study in Hebrew, to say nothing of its rendering into Tagalog. As with Tagalog riddles, this Hebrew riddle involves an unexpected clash or contrast in the images presented. The translators treated it as follows:

<i>"Mula sa mangangain / ay lumabas ang pagkain;</i>	7 + 8 A,A
<i>at mula sa malakas, / matamis ay lumabas."</i>	7 + 7 B,B

“From the eater came out the food;
and from the strong, sweet came out.”

This rendering seems well done. Following classical style the translators could have deleted the enclitic *ay* in line 1, leaving equal half lines all around. Perhaps there are more hints available than in indigenous riddles, since this one is almost like a double riddle in length and style; each half has the form of a single Tagalog riddle, and each half has its distinct set of rhyming syllables. Herrera informs me that “this may resemble the *talinhaga*, an extended form of the riddle.”

To complete the picture, it seems appropriate to look at verse 18. The answer to the riddle:

“*May tatamis pa ba sa pulutpukyutan* 12 A

at may lalakas pa ba sa leong matapang? 13 A

“Is there something more sweet than bee-honey
and is there anything that will be stronger than a fierce lion?”

And Samson’s response:

“*Kundi pa ninyo sinapakat ang aking maybahay* 15 A

hindi ninyo malalaman kung ano’ng kasagutan. 15 A

“If you had not conspired with my house-owner [wife]
you could not know what was the answer.”

The chief purpose for rendering this part of the conversation in poetic form seems to have been to reflect the Hebrew word-games being played out at Samson’s wedding feast — and the Tagalog reader will have no problem recognizing this fact. There seems to be a genre for such brief poetic repartee in the final words of a *Balagtasán*, and Pepa agrees with this possibility. The contestants may become rather heated and shout brief sets of lines at each other. The translators have simply rendered each quotation as a pair of rhyming lines of equal length. (Again, they could have left *at* implicit, first quotation, second line, ending the first line with a semicolon.) The Hebrew form of Samson’s response uses the figure of plowing with Samson’s heifer. That figure has been abandoned in the translation. As Pepa states, “The figure of plowing with Samson’s heifer has been abandoned in the Tagalog translation . . . simply because a direct translation of it in Tagalog would not mean what the figure wants to say. There is no such idiom in Tagalog to mean ‘conspiring with the wife.’ The more functional alternative is to directly state the meaning, as has been done in the translation.” There are other features of the Hebrew form of this repartee that cannot be duplicated in Tagalog, but this is typical of the loss of form in translating poetry.

The form of the proverb was perhaps the first form which our Bible translators rendered according to normal Tagalog poetic structure. The translators came to 2 Peter 2.22b: “The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire” (RSV). After they rendered the two proverbs in standard prose form, they realized that the

translation was accurate, but it simply would not function as a pair of proverbs. They therefore revised the translation and came up with the following final form:

<i>"Ang aso ay hayop, likas ang damdamin</i>	12 A
<i>Na sa isinuka ay nagbabalik din."</i>	12 A
<i>"Ito namang baboy, paliguan mo man,</i>	12 B
<i>Babalik na muli sa dating lubluban."</i>	12 B
"The dog is an animal, natural its instinct	
That to what it vomited it also returns."	
"As for this pig, even if you bathe it,	
It will return again to its former wallowing-place."	

It is evident, of course, that the translators made the saying somewhat verbose by making explicit some implicit information. Perhaps this was necessary in order to have the traditional two-line proverb. However, Pepa agrees that it would have been better to make them more brief and concise. Since the two proverbs are twins, so to speak, and since the second is related to the first by *naman* "as for", it may have been better to consider the pair as a single quotation. However, note that each of the line pairs rhymes separately from the other. Each line consists of twelve syllables, and a break occurs in the middle of each line. Such line divisions don't seem to occur in proverbs, and the lines themselves are more verbose than any local proverbs we have encountered. It is clear that the normal, terse form for Tagalog proverbs has not been followed strictly. Proverbs and riddles that grow spontaneously from images and sounds available within a language group's culture can often be kept terse quite easily. Translators normally have difficulty matching such terseness when they are forced to use the same images and explicit referents.

Naturally the translators decided to use as much as they could of the Tagalog poetic form when they translated the book of Proverbs. Whether they did it wisely is difficult to determine in some places. We will not take space here to show details, but a study of chapters 1 and 6 reveals the following:

Chapter 1.1-6 is translated as a prose introduction; it certainly is not the kind of material one would work into standard proverb form in Tagalog (although Pepa feels that for other reasons it would have been good to use poetic form here as well). Although 1.7 lacks the figurative speech normal for a proverb, the translators rendered it as a short poem – a wise saying whose form will not be taken wrongly by the reader. The lines are much longer than normal for a proverb. Whether this fact is important must be determined by native speakers. Pepa feels that "the two lines of Prov 1.7 can be taken as two distinct proverbs, and they should be made to appear as such. Each line should therefore be revised to create rhyming syllables. Other similar cases in the book of Proverbs should be treated the same."

Chapter 1.8-19 is also rendered in poetic lines, with rhyming at the end of each pair of lines. Pepa agrees that the lines themselves do not match at all in terms of syllable count, although each pair never differs

by more than two or four syllables. Again, if there is good reason to translate these verses into poetic form, the reason is not that these are proverbs. However, Herrera informs me that this kind of admonition may well be stated in Tagalog poetic form. It would be interesting to deal with this question at a workshop.

Proverbs 10 begins a series of statements that are considered proverbs in the Hebrew sense. The translators turned every one of them into a pair of lines rhyming at the end, but only in rare cases does the syllable count match. Furthermore, although the habit of pairing lines in Tagalog is a convenient match for parallelism in Hebrew, the resulting translation becomes somewhat lengthy. The shorter Tagalog lines contain sixteen syllables, some over twenty, while the samples we reviewed of native Tagalog proverbs have at the most only eight syllables per line. One must say, therefore, that what we find may perhaps be a good adaptation in the direction of the normal Tagalog proverb form, but these proverbs retain a bit of a Hebrew accent.

Standard poems. In many instances the Tagalog committee took the cues of RSV in determining what was done originally in poetic form, and in deciding to render such sections as poetry in Tagalog. This applies to many sections of prophecy, for example. At some time it will be necessary to review all instances and determine whether some principles can be found by which to determine whether poetry is the proper medium for such material. The first man's response upon seeing his wife, Gen 2.23, and the Song of Lamech, Gen 4.23-24, were treated poetically, with uneven results. In Gen 2.23 the line pairs that rhyme do not coincide with lines that equal each other in length. As an equivalent of a *diona* wedding song, the decision to use poetry may have been an appropriate one.

Gen 4.23-24 exhibits a clear rhyming pattern with nearly even line length. A Tagalog expert should be able to determine whether this song resembles the *kumintang*, the war or battle song.

The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) became somewhat of a showpiece at the 1974 Follow-up Seminar for translators, held in San Juan, Laguna. The Tagalog translators divided it into several stanzas, singing it to known and popular melodies, changing the melody from stanza to stanza. Unfortunately problems of equivalence made it necessary to alter many of the lines in the final translation, but the demonstration was effective in showing the other language committees present that much can be done in using poetic forms in translation.

Psalms. One naturally anticipates that the psalms will be considered for rendering in poetic form. My impression is that the poetic form of the psalms has been quite favorably received. Dr. Eliseo M. Pajaro was director of the school of music at University of the Philippines and later chairman of the board of the Philippine Bible Society, 1980-1981. It was reported that he planned to write music for some of the psalms. Meanwhile Dr. Pajaro has passed away, and his compositions, if any, are kept by the University of the Philippines. Some psalms are supposed to have been set to music by Roman Catholic composers, but again nothing

has been seen by Noel Osborn or by others at the Philippine Bible Society. Although the following study will demonstrate problems with the psalms in their present form, Herrera reports that they have been gladly received and used at worship in the church which she attends. This includes singing the psalms and other portions of scripture, using the medium of chant.

This study will look at four psalms, one of which is displayed here, with reports on the other three.

Psalm 1

This psalm has exactly eighteen syllables in all lines. The rhyming pattern varies slightly from verse to verse, apparently dictated by the number of lines needed to reflect the Hebrew message. The only possible flaw in the form of the lines is the addition of the enclitic 'y (for *ay*) at the end of the third line; if that were dropped, the rhyming would be perfect. Pepa regards this as "inelegant," as well as the use of *niyong* in the first line, and I suspect he is correct. He also feels the sentences are not clear and not easy to understand.

Psalm 23

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Si Yahweh ang aking Pastol, hindi ako magkukulang.</i> | 16 A |
| 2. <i>Ako'y pinahihimlay sa mainam na pastulan,
At inaakay niya ako sa tahimik na batisan,</i> | 15 A
17 A |
| 3. <i>Binibigyan niya ako niyong bagong kalakasan.
At sang-ayon sa pangako na kaniyang binitiwang
Sa matuwid na ladasi'y doon ako inaakay.</i> | 16 A
16 A
16 A |
| 4. <i>Kahit na ang daang iyo'y tumatahak sa karimlan,
Hindi ako matatakot pagkat ikaw'y kaagapay;
Ang tungkod mo at pamalo ang gabay ko at sanggalang.</i> | 16 A
16 A
16 A |
| 5. <i>Sa harapan ng lingkod mo, ikaw ay may handang dulang,
Ito'y iyong ginagawang nakikita ng kaaway;
Nalulugod ka sa akin na ulo ko ay langisan
At pati na ang saro ko ay iyong pinaapaw.</i> | 16 A
16 A
16 A
16 A |
| 6. <i>Tunay na ang pag-ibig mo at ang iyong kabutihan,
Sasaaki't tataglayin habang ako'y nabubuhay;
Doon ako sa templo mo lalagi at mananahan.</i> | 16 A
16 A
16 A |
| 1. 'Yahweh is my Shepherd, I will not lack. | |
| 2. I am made to lie down in a pleasant pasture,
And I am led by him to a quiet spring-brook, | |
| 3. By him I am given that new strength.
And according to the promise that he has rendered (released)
In a straight path there I will be guided. | |
| 4. Even though that path makes its way in darkness,
I will not fear because you are alongside;
Your walking stick and [spanking/beating] paddle are my
[hand-]guide and protection. | |

5. In front of your servant, you have a prepared dining-table,
This is what you are doing that is seen by [the] enemy;
You are pleased with me who my head is oiled
And even my chalice is made to overflow by you.
6. Truly your love and your goodness/generosity
Will be with me and carried/possessed as long as I am living;
There in your temple I will remain and will dwell.'

In this psalm only the second and third lines have a syllable count that differs slightly from that of the other lines; the sentence structure is such that this could have been adjusted quite easily. Pepa suggests the following revision for those two lines:

*Pinahihimlay n'ya ako sa mainam na pastulan,
at inaakay din naman sa tahimik na batisan.*

Note that there is only one rhyming set used throughout. While this may seem a bit unusual in poetry, it is not unusual for Tagalog poetry. Herrera informs me that this may imply the entire poem is regarded as one long stanza.

Psalm 46

This psalm regularly has twelve syllables per line. Four lines have thirteen syllables each, but all of them contain two syllables involving *-iya-* or *-iy-*; these could be pronounced as one, reducing the syllable count to that of the other lines. The rhyming pattern seems to be in line with what is acceptable in Tagalog poetry: vv.1-3, four As; vv.4-6, two Bs, three Cs, two As; v.7, two As; vv.8-11, two Cs, three Ds, six As. The refrain in verses 7 and 11 belongs to the rhyming set designated "A" in this psalm, and the refrain in each case also rhymes with the preceding lines.

Psalm 141

The Tagalog translation of this psalm seems to demonstrate that, if good quality can not be assured, it is better to postpone going to print, or perhaps it may even be better to treat the psalm as elevated prose. This rendering was particularly difficult for this non-native to back-translate into English. It appears that faulty and misleading punctuation may be involved. The sentence patterns do not follow normal prose forms and are sometimes difficult to disentangle. One wonders whether certain spoken tones, pauses, and other suprasegmentals may have been understood by the translator, apart from whether the reader understands them. Pepa has supplied his evaluation as a native speaker: "The translation of Psalm 141 defeats the principle of functional equivalence in the use of terms not common to the target audience (e.g., *lilo*, *balakyot*, *pagwikaan*). There are also inelegant lines like lines 4 of v.4, 1 of v.6, and 1 of v.8. Generally, the poetic flow is not smooth."

As to form, it seems quite good. Two syllables can be condensed in the first line to make a perfect match of syllable length throughout.

There is a good variety of rhyming sets employed, and in steady and recognizable patterns. It is apparent that this psalm was translated with a greater concern for form than for content.

Tentative Conclusions

1. It is clear that there is great potential in the Philippines for translating certain portions of the Bible in poetic form, following common poetic style in the country.

2. Before such translating is undertaken, it is important to get a clear understanding of the norms of good indigenous poetry. The study must include: a. Overt forms such as meter, line length, rhyming patterns.

b. Varieties of poetic genre, such as epic, song, riddle/proverb, free verse.

c. Style of expression, including degrees of adherence to normal forms of expression, discourse markings that signal poetic form, kinds of imagery, etc.

3. Principles must be established as to what genres of biblical text lend themselves to poetic form, and what genres should not be rendered poetically. These principles should be determined without being bound to what is rendered poetically in the ancient biblical texts.

4. After reviewing the above points translators should find it possible to review the nature of biblical poetry of both Testaments. It is important to evaluate features of biblical poetry and determine whether counterparts exist in the poetry of the receptor language.

a. If counterparts exist, there should be no problem in using them.

b. If counterparts do not exist, it must be determined whether the biblical features can be utilized effectively in the receptor language. If they can not, and if there is no substitute, they must be abandoned or ignored. Chiasmus, for example, may remain present in translation by virtue of normal equivalence, yet have no significance whatever for the receptor.

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PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS IN URAK LAWOI'

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PART 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE SUPERNATURAL

Part 1 of this paper concluded that the lists of terms for "principalities and powers" in the New Testament referred to "powerful supernatural beings or forces with at least the potential of being harmful to people's best interests, often directly opposed to God's purposes, but clearly subjected to Christ by his death, ascension and ultimate victory." We will now investigate how these terms can best be rendered in the language of the animistic Urak Lawoi' people of South Thailand.

SPIRITS, ANCESTORS AND ANGELS

The Urak Lawoi' share many of the components of their world-view with people of primal religions throughout the world.¹ Although the tribal religious practices are in places falling into neglect, the outlook remains dominant. The world around them contains many invisible actors, spiritual powers which must be taken into account in any plan or activity. These include ancestral spirits, evil spirits and local guardian spirits. Some may be able to be manipulated but they are ignored at one's peril. By contrast, the "Great God Above" (*tuhat besal deq ataih*) is relatively uninterested in daily affairs and consequently receives little attention. Impersonal forces, as such, play only a limited role in Urak Lawoi' thought because they derive their power from personal spirits. Magic (*aye lemu*) is a powerful force but a practitioner relies on his spirit teacher to effect it. The word *guru* is said by some to refer to the spirit teacher, but by others to the magic phrase which he teaches to his pupil. (This term has had to be avoided in the gospels where the disciples refer to Jesus as "Teacher".) Once learnt, however, such a phrase has independent power in itself. Luck (*groh*) is another powerful influence and the bi-annual cleansing ceremonies for the village are intended to clear bad luck away. But again, bad luck is administered by bad spirits. There is no independent concept of destiny or impersonal fate. Thus the impersonal forces fail to provide us with suitable vocabulary to translate the spiritual powers.

Research into the different names and characteristics of the various supernatural beings suggests they can be broadly classified into two groups: Spirit Beings, which are frequently encountered in daily life, and

1 See, e.g., Burnett (1988), 17-21.