

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 20, no. 4 (1972): 563–576

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Some Epic Laws of the Donggon: A Study in Structure

EVELYN H. NUNES

Studies in traditional narrative have in the past been concerned more with theories of its ontology, the social values, and the life-style of the people among whom the art of oral literature flourished. Apart from the pioneering works of Amador Daguio and E. Arsenio Manuel, little has been done with the intrinsic qualities of traditional narrative as literature, much less its structure.

When one examines closely a traditional narrative, one discovers that, like written literature, oral literature has unity, form, and has likewise to adhere to established conventions. A notable characteristic of traditional narrative is its consistent form. The content may vary but the form is "relatively stable"¹ and could thus be verified. The significance of its stability dawned on the writer's consciousness when she visited Ulang Udig and listened to him sing, some 16 years after Professor Landa Jocano recorded the *Labaw Donggon* from the old man's lips.² At that time, Ulang Udig gave his age at 87. Today, at 102, Ulang Udig remains the accomplished singer of tales that he is as he chanted the *Labaw Donggon* anew

¹ Alan Dundes, "Form in Folklore," in *The Study of Folklore*, Alan Dundes, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 127.

² F. Landa Jocano, "The Epic of Labaw Donggon," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* 29 (1): 1-103 (entire issue).

for the writer's benefit. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) To discover how Olrik's epic laws³ function in a non-Western oral literature; and (2) To examine whether the hero, Labaw Donggon, fits the pattern of a heroic life found among traditional heroes of Indo-European heroic legends.

Axel Olrik's epic laws stress the importance of the manner the *sage* opens and closes. The *sage* commences in a quiet mood, progresses to excitement or stress, and after a catastrophic event involving a principal character, the sage falls back from excitement to its original quiet mood. This calm-excitement/stress-calm rhythm occurs in a series in *Labaw Donggon*. To illustrate:

<i>Calm</i>	<i>Excitement/Stress</i>	<i>Calm</i>
A. Courtship and marriage of goddess Alunsina and Paubari.	Vengeance of the gods against Paubari and his people.	Datu Paubari and Abyang Alunsina settle in Halawed after the deluge.
B. Birth of Labaw Donggon and his brothers, Humadapnon and Dumalapdap.	Labaw Donggon battles Sikay Padalogdog and Saragnayan.	Labaw Donggon is reunited with his family; his powers are restored.
C. Birth of Labaw Donggon's sons, Asu Mangga and Baranugan.	The two brothers look for their imprisoned father; they battle Saragnayan and his allies.	Reunion with parents and kinsmen.

Section A serves as a prologue to the action proper, which is the amorous adventures of the hero. In the Abyang Alunsina-Datu Paubari episode, one recognizes the familiar creation

³ Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in *The Study of Folklore*, Alan Dundes, ed. (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 129-41.

⁴ Jan de Vries, "The Pattern of an Heroic Life," in *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, Jan de Vries, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 210-26.

myth and the probably universal flood motif which we find in other traditional literature such as the Near East epic *Gilgamesh*.

The singer of tales at the moment of performance before a critical audience gradually and calmly but with consummate skill unfolds the narrative with an attention-getting, long, and drawn-out "Odoyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy."

<i>Text</i>	<i>Translation⁵</i>
Odoyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy	Odoyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
Alialion tang sugid	Let us narrate with care
Sumadangun tang surundun	Take note in much detail
Ang pagkatao du tu	The birth of the
Ka tatlong alawon.	Three princes.
Tay Buyung Labaw Donggon	Buyung Labaw Donggon
Nga natawu du tu	Who was born in
Sa busong	The womb
Ni Anggoy Alunsina	Of Anggoy Alunsina
Wara lamang ka pidngi	Not long after he was born
Wara ka piripidngi	Hardly noticed by anyone
Nahimu datung tawu	Became a mature man
Namhan datung alawun.	A sturdy prince.

The singer ends his tale in the peaceful atmosphere of the hero's home with Labaw Donggon reunited with his loved ones. The ethnoepic *Labaw Donggon* with its felicitous ending differs from the closing of other folk epics. In *Beowulf*, for instance, the last glimpse one gets is of the people mourning for the fallen hero, and the pessimistic note of dire events to come; in *Chanson de Roland*, one sees the archangel Gabriel prodding Charlemagne to get ready for another battle against the infidels, while the king weeps and plucks his beard, vainly protesting "How weary is (his) life."⁶ In the *Nibelungenlied*, the picture is of massacre and carnage as the amazon Kriemhild exacts vengeance for Siegfried's death. In *Gilgamesh*, the hero was just in time to espy a serpent crawling away with

⁵ As recorded and translated into English by Professor Jocano. The text is the only one published.

⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers trans., *The Song of Roland* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 203.

the flower of youth and Gilgamesh dejectedly learns (and consequently accepts with resignation), that the fruit of the heroic quest is failure. No one who is mortal could seek release from death.

The ending of *Labaw Donggon* would have more in common with the culmination of such traditional narrative as *Poema de Mio Cid*, the *Odyssey* and the *Ramayana*. The Spanish epic ends with the "*reestablecimiento de la perdida honra del Cid*." Odysseus in the Greek epic finds himself reunited with Penelope and Telemachus after an absence of 20 years. Likewise in the Indian epic, Rama and his faithful wife Sita are reunited after he rescued her in Lanka and Rama is installed as ruler of Ayodhya. These epics, including the Panay ethnoepic, end in a triumphant note and especially with the latter, the note is "Tarzanic" as *Labaw Donggon* regains his powers. The closing lines of *Labaw Donggon* will illustrate my meaning:

Text	Translation
Suminggit si Labaw Donggon	Labaw Donggon shouted
Sumarigyak	He gave a loud cry
Nabangian ang lunuk	The lunuk's branch broke
Nasingan ang mamurung	Its bower is torn away
Nabangian ang Himbalod	The strong Himbalod broke
Nasing-an ang talaytay	The nearby ridge parted
Araw-araw pa dia nga limog	What a voice that was
Sumadang nga sibagon	What a powerful cry
Sibagon ka agyadan	The cry of a skilled one
Limog ka busalian	The voice of the fighter
Si Datu Labaw Donggon	Datu Labaw Donggon

(Lines 2315-25)

Because oral literature lacks the full-bodied detail of description found in written literature, the teller of tales has to resort to repetition.

Everytime that a striking scene occurs in the narrative and continuity permits, the scene is repeated. This is necessary not only to build up tension but to fill up the narrative . . . it is important to point out that without repetition, the sage cannot attain its fullest form.⁷

Repetition is the basic stylistic device in *Labaw Donggon*. A close reading of the epic reveals the various types of repeti-

⁷ Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," p. 138.

tions employed. One is narrative repetition, which is best shown in the following:

- A. Labaw Donggon asks his mother for his suit as he prepares for his journey to Handog.

Bukada nga bukada	Open, please open
Si Barugbugan Umbaw	The great wooden chest
Linimbuay takop na	Whose heavy cover
Tinakpay gala-gala.	Is elaborately carved.
Pagpiria araya	Then select from there
Pagturudaytudaya	Very carefully
Si Kamahalan kong manggad.	My treasured possessions
Si bot-anan nga panapton.	My fine clothes.
(Lines 16-23)	

- B. Labaw Donggon asks his wife for his suit, as he prepares to search for his father.

Nga bukada nga bukada	Open, please open
Si Barugbugan Umbaw	The great wooden chest
Linimbuay takop na	Whose heavy cover
Tinakpay gala-gala.	Is elaborately carved.
Pagpiria araya	Then select from there
Pagturudaytudaya	Very carefully
Si Kamahalan manggad	My treasured possessions
Si bot-anang panapton.	My fine clothes.
(Lines 400-408)	

- C. Asu Mangga asks his mother for his suit, as he prepares to search for his father.

Nga bukada nga bukada	Open, please open
Si Barugbugan Umbaw	The great wooden chest
Iinimbay takop na	Whose great heavy cover
Tinakpay gala-gala.	Is elaborately carved.
Pagpiria piria	And select there from
Pagturudaytudaya	Very carefully
Si Kamahalan manggad	My treasured possessions
Si bot-anang panapton.	My treasured clothes.
(Lines 580-87)	

- D. Baranugun asks his mother for his suit, as he prepares to search for his father. In this stanza, the repetition has become incremental:

Abi, Nanay bukada nga bukada	Suppose, Mother open
Si Barugbugan Umbaw	
Linimbuay takop na	The great wooden chest
Tinakpay gala-gala.	Whose heavy cover
Suralongon ko sa biridlan	Is elaborately carved.
	As I consult my charm
Kon ano ang ginagyan	As to what had happened
Kon ano ang ginsapigadan.	As to what was his fate.
	(Lines 887-94)

In the ethnoepic *Labaw Donggon* as in the epic *Gilgamesh*, narrative repetition is only partial. There is no evidence of whole narrative repetition in the text. Certain striking actions and incidents as well as the careful carrying out of a ritual are repeated whenever continuity permits it.

Besides narrative repetition and incremental repetition, sequential repetition is also employed as a stylistic device:

Kapurut nang kapurut	Then he picked up
Kalu nang saramingku	His hat Saramingku
Nagahugaras sa hanginon	Which sang with the wind
Nagahugaring sa bugayunon	In such sweet refrain
Kapurut nang kapurut	Then he picked up beside him
Bahag nang tibangtimbang	His waist-band long and wide
Tampion sa gisadon	Which he folded neatly
Gintumbay karaway.	On his front.
	(Lines 41-43; 47-50)

The singer of *Labaw Donggon* also makes use of intensifying repetition. For example:

Imaw da ang akon panodlon	She is the one I'll wed
Imaw gid akon panuungun.	She is the one I'll marry.

(Lines 199-200)

The lines cited above could likewise be an example of what Greenway calls "repeating parallelism" in which the second

line repeats the first in a slightly different form.⁸ This is a stylistic device which is quite common in Semitic literature. In the Bible, for example, one notices it in the penitential psalms, in the laments in the Book of Sirach, and in the Book of Job. In *Labaw Donggon*, the device occurs several times, for instance:

Bisan mo aku likman	Even if you lie to me
Bisan mo aku inoman	Even if you deceive me
Diayan man abuntug mu	
Diayan man binukut mu.	Your well-kept one is here (Lines 109-12)
Balikon ugang sa pira ka adlaw	I'll come back someday
Balik sa ibang kurawun.	Come back in some other season (Lines 221-22)
Wara maipu pusod	Whose umbilical cord is uncut.
Wara mab-ol tinai.	(Lines 1422-23)

Antithetical parallelism is also used although not frequently. For example:

Bokut duwang sa aton	Not woven by local hands
Duwang sa ibang bansa.	But those from other lands. (Lines 39-40)

The different kinds of repetitive devices utilized in the ethnoepic show how fully the epic singer made use of them; although simple repetition was not mentioned, it does exist in *Labaw Donggon*, especially in the incantation of magical powers to succor the principal characters in distress. *Labaw Donggon* always calls, "Huyung-huyung ka pamlang/matuod ka busali . . ." whenever he is in peril.

The Law of Three operates in the ethnoepic in much the same way as in the folk narratives where "all which is great exists in threes."⁹ We have an epic triad in *Labaw Donggon*: *Labaw Donggon*, *Humadapnon*, and *Dumalapdap*. In the *Bicol Ibalon*, there are *Baltog*, *Handiong* and *Bantong*. In

⁸ John Greenway, *Literature Among the Primitives* (Hatboro, Penn.: Folklore Associates, 1964), p. 119.

⁹ Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," p. 140.

the Ilianon epic *Agyu*, we have Banlak, Agyu, and Kuyasu. What to my mind is even more significant is the fact that three in *Labaw Donggon* governs the structure of the traditional narrative. Three works in the action: Labaw Donggon sets out on a journey three times; he has three adventures, the third being most crucial. He wins three maidens, the third causing him the greatest difficulty. Even the cosmos has a tripartite division; namely, the Upperworld, the Middleworld, and the Underworld (equivalent to Swah, Bhuvah, and Bhur in Hindu mythology). I suspect that three exerts a similar influence in the Bicol epic if one were to consider that three also operates in the action of Ibalon. In the *Labaw Donggon*, there is clear indication that the number three is not limited to mere mechanical use of the number nor to minor details such as how many times an action is repeated. Three is part of the organizational assumptions of the singer of tales.

In the Panay epic, there is no small and weak character; all are skilled and courageous fighters. The Law of Contrast emphasizes the need for characters who are diametrically opposed to each other such as the forces of Light versus that of Darkness as in *Beowulf*. Because Labaw Donggon is the hero, our sympathy would naturally be with him and the tendency is to relegate to the role of villain his opponent Saragnayan. Viewed from present-day ethics, it is Labaw Donggon's actions which are reprehensible. He is the aggressor. One's judgment of the characters, in this instance, would depend largely on the literary context and one's cultural orientation.

In the absence of historical documents before the *Maragtas* and the Code of Kalantiao, one can only infer that the early Malays of Panay must have lived by the philosophy that might was right and the great man is he with the strong arm and the daring to best all others, amorous exploits included. Where pursuit of women is concerned, the action of the hero should not be looked on with disgust. As Ulang Udig has explained simply, that was how it was in the old days. The eminence of the hero does not depend only on his fighting prowess, valor, strength, and aggressiveness but in doing action which is familiar to all, in maintaining a "community of occupation and interest

with those who are less distinguished . . . and so the whole business of life comes bodily into the epic poem."¹⁹

A good illustration of the Law of Contrast operating in the plot is the clash of partisan factions in the epic; however, the basic contrast of good and evil is absent, that is, in connection with the main characters. The attitude presented here has several things in common with Valmiki's *Ramayana*, where one could find "good" in the ranks of demonic forces and "evil" even among the gods and *rishis*. As Sita pointed out in the last chapter of the Indian epic, no one in the world is blameless. The Law of Contrast is seen working in the battle between Labaw Donggon and Manaluntad, the monster ravaging the Kingdom of Handog; in man against monsters.

The Law of Twins also functions in the epic. In *Labaw Donggon*, we have the siblings, Baranugun and Asu Mangga as a team; the *taghoy* and the *duwende* in the role of messengers. The same is true with the *Udtohanon* and the *Idadalmon* who came to assist Saragnayan.

In his essay on epic laws, Olrik stressed the importance of the Law of Initial and Final Position. In a religious context, *Toppegewicht* rules (as it does in the *Ramayana*) but in a folk narrative, *Achtergewicht* predominates and our sympathy goes to the youngest son or daughter. Determining predominance of positions, however, has much to do with one's perspectives. In the ethnoepic, *Achtergewicht* does not apply; the eldest son, Labaw Donggon, fills the most important position. The younger sons, though equally heroic, fill a secondary role. This could be attributed to the mythic quality of the epic.

In folk tradition, the Law of Concentration on a Leading Character is significant. In *Labaw Donggon*, great attention is focused on the hero. The Datu Paubari-Abyang Alunsina episode serves as an introduction which sets the genealogy of the hero and creates an event which makes it possible for Labaw Donggon to logically appear and for the narrative to

¹⁹ W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc), p. 9.

move forward. The structure of the Panay epic hinges on the figure of Labaw Donggon. The Baranugun-Asu Mangga adventure is motivated by the father's imprisonment and the fact that family honor has to be avenged. The narrative elements which span three generations revolve on the character of the hero. Thus epic unity and ideal epic unity are fused in *Labaw Donggon* as the plot shows narrative elements that create an event and narrative elements which illustrate the relationship of the characters.

The ethnoepic's concentration on a leading character behooves us to examine the hero's life. Using Professor de Vries' categories¹¹ as guide, I shall attempt to discover whether Labaw Donggon conforms to the pattern of a heroic life found among traditional heroes of Indo-European heroic legends.

1. The begetting of the hero.

Labaw Donggon is half man and half god. His mother is a virgin, but she is not overpowered by a god; nor does she have any extramarital relations with the hero's father. The common motif in Greek narratives, that of a father-god, is inverted in the Panay epic. In *Labaw Donggon*, it is the hero's mother who is a deity. The father is presented as a *datu*, not a god in the guise of an animal; nor is the hero conceived in incest. In this respect, Labaw Donggon is closer to Gilgamesh, whose mother Ninsun, was also a goddess. In both heroes, it is noteworthy to mention that it is their humanness, not their divinity which the singer of tales chose to highlight.

2. The birth of the hero.

The birth of the hero takes place in an unnatural way or is connected with something extraordinary. Rama, Lakshmana; Shatrughna and Bharata in the Indian epic resulted from the dish of payasa which the gods prepared for King Dasaratha's consorts. Enkidu in Gilgamesh was fashioned by the goddess Aruru from the riverbank clay and then transported as an adult to the forest. Lam-ang in the Ilocano epic,

¹¹ de Vries, "The Pattern of an Heroic Life," pp. 210-26.

Labaw Donggon, Humadapnon, and Dumlapdap in the Panay epic, could talk right after they were born. In fact, Abyang Alunsina's sons became full grown men not long after they were delivered. In this respect, they bear a resemblance to the Babylonian Enkidu and the Persian heroes Cyrus and Kaj Chosrev.

3. The way in which the hero is brought up.

Because Labaw Donggon, like Gilgamesh, has no childhood, there is no section in the ethnoepic devoted to his upbringing as in the case of Dasaratha's sons; however, there is an interesting detail which F. Landa Jocano mentioned in section IV of his anthropological study: The goddess-mother Alunina requested the *babaylan* to perform rites for their well-being. This was done through fumigation.

4. The youth of the hero is threatened.

This does not occur at all in Labaw Donggon's life. The world of the ethnoepic depicts a happy family relationship and illustrates in fact, the close ties existing between the parents and offsprings; Datu Paubari loves Labaw Donggon, being his first born. He and his goddess-wife Alunsina retired to the misty heights of Madya-as and left Labaw Donggon to rule in Halawod when their son took a wife. The structure of *Labaw Donggon* shows that the hero does not pose a threat to the parents.

5. The hero often acquires invulnerability.

Although Labaw Donggon is presented as a demigod, he is not invincible. His duel with Saragnayan shows how vulnerable he is. There is no evidence that he has a horny skin like Siegfried, neither does he have Isfandiar's impenetrable skin nor Achilles' invincibility. Although his mother is a deity, Labaw Donggon himself is only half god and it is his mortal side which is given dimension in the epic. Gods and goddesses may figure in the ethnoepic as part and parcel of the supernatural machinery or *deus ex machina* but it is evident as in *Agyu* and *Gilgamesh* that the concern of the singer of tales is

the affairs of men, their mortality. The world of *Labaw Donggon*, as in *Gilgamesh*, is clearly anthropocentric.

6. One of the most heroic deeds is the fight with the dragon or another monster.

There are no dragons to slay in *Labaw Donggon*. The hero's deeds do not include a feat common among Germanic and Persian heroes (i.e., Beowulf, Siegfried, Woldietrich; Rustum, Artachsir, Isfandiar). The closest that we have to dragons are the giant crocodiles in both the Bicol and the Ilocano epic. *Labaw Donggon* frees a ravaged kingdom from the incursions of Manaluntad, a Grendelesque monster. He also vanquishes Sikay Padalogdog, a giant with a hundred arms. In *Ibalon* one sees Handiong, Baltog, and Bantong performing similar feats. There is also a similarity in the Panay epic and the Indian epic not only in the characters' great reliance on the power of charms, magic and rituals, or the weapons they use in combat—uprooting trees, bows and arrows. Both *Labaw Donggon* and *Rama* fight a particular type of enemy: ogre, giant, man-eating monsters.

7. The hero wins a maiden, usually after overcoming great dangers.

This motif could be seen in a number of Philippine ethnopoics where courtship and marriage are important themes. Examples are *Agyu*, *Biag ni Lam-ang*, *Hudhud*, and *Labaw Donggon*.

Labaw Donggon has to save Anggoy Ginbitinan and the Kingdom of Handog from Manaluntad; he has to fight with Sikay Padalogdog before he can win Anggoy Doroonon. In his third adventure, *Labaw Donggon* has to contend with Buyung Saragnayan, his most formidable foe before he gets Nagmalitong Yawa Sinakmaling Diwata. In fact, his fight with the Keeper of Light proves disastrous for him.

8. The hero makes an expedition to the Underworld.

Labaw Donggon does this in the narrative and therefore shares this motif with Odysseus and Ajax in the Greek epic,

Gilgamesh in the epic of the Near East and Vainamönen in the *Kalevala*.

9. When the hero is banished in his youth, he returns later and is victorious over his enemies. In some cases, he has to leave the realm again which he has won with such difficulty.

This motif is absent in the ethnoepic. It is Labaw Donggon who voluntarily sets out from Halawod in search of adventure. His return after imprisonment was affected by his sons.

10. The death of the hero.

If one were to group various events in a hero's life into three, one would have birth, youth and return or death. This could be said of Enkidu, Beowulf, Roland and Siegfried. Generally, the hero dies young in heroic legends; Labaw Donggon does not even die old. Like the *Odyssey*, the epic of Panay closes with the hero's return to his Kingdom and his reunion with his family. Thus *Labaw Donggon* shows the pattern of the hero's life in a state of incompleteness, if one expects the final rite de passage from which no traveller returns to be the logical end of the narrative.

This paper has attempted to show first, how Olrik's epic laws function in *Labaw Donggon*, epic of Panay; second, this paper has tried to examine whether the hero's life pattern in the epic conforms with the pattern of a heroic life found among traditional heroes of Indo-European heroic legends. Examination of the text shows that the following epic laws are adhered to in the epic: first, the Law of Opening and Closing; second, the Law of Repetition; third, the Law of Three and; fourth, the Law of Concentration on a Leading Character. The Law of Initial and Final Position does not fit *Labaw Donggon* at all.

Examination of the pattern of the hero's life reveals that Professor de Vries' ten categories work moderately well. This is to say that the hero of the epic shares with Indo-European traditional heroes of heroic legends five and a half of the ten categories and major motifs mentioned in de Vries' essay. They

are the following: the begetting of the hero (with modification); the birth of the hero; common heroic deed: fight with dragon or monster; hero wins maiden after great difficulty and the hero makes an expedition to the underworld. The one half is for category three, the way the hero was brought up.

Over and beyond the writer's interest to determine whether Olrik's epic laws and de Vries' pattern of a heroic life could be profitably used in studying non-Western oral literature, the writer has tried to point out the stability of form in traditional narratives. Clearly, the singer of tales has to operate within the confines of convention to produce a work of art. This is not to say that one should look at tradition as unquestioning acceptance of a fossilized body of conventions and motifs; rather, one should look at tradition as an organic habit of recreating what has been transmitted. The epic is after all not merely a genre; it is a way of life.