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## COLONIAL AND CONQUEST LORE OF THE MARIANAS A Critical Commentary

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Building on the body of literature from pre-colonial times, Chamorro culture developed a substantial body of literature, in the form of oral traditions and lore. Some of these were steeped in Christian religious tradition, others are a merger of Christian and pre-Christian concepts, while others reflect on resistance to the (Spanish) colonial power. This paper reviews and provides a critical commentary on a selection of material, demonstrating significant changes and alterations of the folklore as it moved from themes of power, pride, and freedom, to those of trickery and romantic tragedy.

In a previous paper I have discussed pre-Contact Marianas literature, folklore and legends (Torres 2003), as part of a critical commentary and review of the scope of literature and folklore of the Mariana Island group in Micronesia and discuss the emergence of a written body of literature from what was originally an oral tradition

The present paper attempts to show how the traditional lore changed remarkably after Magellan's discovery and the Jesuit arrival in the Marianas. Its discussion focuses on those tales that arose during the Spanish colonial domination as a way of looking at how the literary tradition moved away from the native traditional themes and genres towards European models with their tales of miracles, Christian imagery, and other Spanish motifs.

### COLONIAL AND CONQUEST LORE

The distinction between pre-contact and colonial tales can be seen in the imagery and themes drawn from Spanish or Christian sources following the European landings. However, as with the caveat in the preceding chapter's

final legend and its variants, one can only presume that the collectors of these legends were both comprehensive in their compilations and accurate in their renderings. The stories that followed Magellan's encounter with the Chamorros and Father Sanvitores's missions give testimony to the significant alteration of the folklore and literature of the islands since their discovery. Colonial stories show positive depictions of Christian and Spanish images than the early legends that celebrated Chamorro pride and power. Whereas the Chamorro created tales out of native mythology to explicate the origins and sources of geographic features, animals, or mysterious occurrences, the post-conquest stories attributed such ontologies to God and divine intervention. One can also see, with the "Legend of the Flame Tree," the parallels certain tales bear with European counterparts in both plot and organization. It is an example of a territorial dispute tale in which the Western plot and motif of star-crossed lovers becomes assumed into Marianas folklore. Thus, interpretations will be offered to support the view that European in-

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fluence on the Chamorro oral tradition was not an accident and has served to erase their traditional values.

### CHRISTIAN THEMES WITH NATIVE IMAGES

#### *Legend of Sirena the Mermaid*

The motif of the young girl Sirena, aligned with the Greek Sirens, is particularly interesting because it combines the Christian image of a Catholic godmother and baptism with a pagan curse. I submit that the image of the mermaid is a universal motif that exists in many cultures, including Micronesian folklore; yet, the influence of Western “mermaid” lore seems to also stand out in this tale. Because her daughter was so fond of the water and spent her days and free time swimming, Sirena’s mother cursed her daughter into becoming a fish; however, her godmother, who christened her “heart, mind, and thoughts,” allowed only half of Sirena to become a fish. It is from then that the young mermaid became free to swim and sing as she pleased (Grey 1951, p. 32-33).

Whatever European and Christian influence there is in this tale, a more important question would look at the juxtaposition between the Chamorro curse and the Catholic elements of baptism, and the godmother who protects the young child. In this story, we see the expression of the native Chamorro belief in the power of the word to curse, opposed to the Christian attitude toward the young resulting in a “mermaid” compromise of the godmother as protector. It marks a binary opposition between the last vestiges of Chamorro pagan beliefs and the new Christian religion. It is also interesting to note that there are no male figures in this legend, which suggests a movement from a patriarchal emphasis to a matrilineal social organization in which the image of the Virgin Mary as embodied by the godmother symbolizes the female resolve. The young girl’s desire to remain in the water might be interpreted as a form of escapism in which she desired to leave the conquered world. If so, her mother’s jealousy at her own lack of freedom, motivates her curse on her own child. At the same time the irony is that it is the mother who is cursed because she must live in the colonial

world. In either case, it is clear that native and imported values are dealt with ambiguously, reflecting an uncertain hold on either.

Without delving into the multiple implications and meanings of this tale, it is apparent that from a historical and political perspective, the impact of colonialism turns these stories into texts in which the Chamorro implicitly reflects and expresses the experience of being controlled by outsiders. One can also see the tales as overt constructs by the colonizers and Christians to infuse the culture with Christian values as another step toward the total conversion of the people.

#### *Santa Maria del Camarin (The Virgin of the Crabs)*

This tale offers an explanation about how the Virgin Mary arrived on Guam. As the tale goes in both Van Peenen’s version and the Nieves M. Flores Library (1971) variant, a fisherman was casting his net on the reef when he saw the statue of the Virgin Mary being carried on the water by two giant crabs. When some Spanish soldiers saw the object on the beach where the fisherman had taken it, one of them spoke rudely in its presence; whereupon the Virgin turned her back on the offending soldier. Many of the natives heard of this event and congregated in front of the soldiers’ barracks where they venerated the statue. Eventually, word spread of the miracle and the statue was transferred to the Cathedral where it remains to this day (Van Peenen 1974, p. 33).

It is no wonder that the natives today believe that Guam is under the special protection of the Virgin Mary. The new converts believe that she chose their island as her home and Chamorros to be her chosen people. Aside from the appearance of the Virgin as a Christian motif, another way of viewing this tale is that it was part of an overt attempt by zealous converts to romanticize the story of the arrival of Christianity upon the islands and to propagate the notion that the Chamorros (and not the Spaniards) were the chosen people of God.

With this legend, there is the simultaneous pairing of a pagan myth of giant crabs with a Christian image in a tale that tries to incorporate a traditional Chamorro view of nature with Catholic icons. The legend is an example of the

gradual incorporation of Christian legend into native tales. As with the Jesuit program of conversion, these intrusions into the oral traditions were gradual but definite: all native rituals, customs, and practices faded away to be replaced by the rituals of the Church. A final example of the Christianization of Chamorro folklore is the historical legend of the martyrdom of Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores on April 2, 1672, on Guam.

*Why the Waters of Tumon Bay Are Red*

The martyrdom of Father Sanvitores, the first Jesuit missionary in the Marianas, occurred because he had baptized the daughter of Chief Matapang against the chief's wishes. Chief Matapang and another co-conspirator plotted and carried out the assassination of the missionary by striking his head with a machete and driving a spear through his chest. Before he died, he said to the two men, "May God have mercy on your souls" (Van Peenen 1974, p. 15). Paul Carano's account of the killing added that the two men dragged his body to the beach, put the body in a canoe, tied stones to his feet, and threw him overboard. As they paddled away, Sanvitores's body supposedly rose to the surface and grasped the canoe. When the two men again struck the body, it arose again three times before it finally sank (Carano 1985, p. 75).

According to the legend, it was Sanvitores's killing that caused the waters of Tumon Bay to turn red on the anniversaries of Father Sanvitores death. Van Peenen (1974, p. 15) notes that the ocean waters turn reddish because of an algae that flourishes in Spring. Paul Carano's version takes the romanticizing of this event even further by pointing out that Sanvitores's body rising out of the water three times by suggesting a connection with the number of times Christ fell on his way to Calvary, the Holy Trinity, Christ's resurrection after three days, and all the various other Christian allusions to the number three. That Sanvitores became a candidate for sainthood based on this depiction of his martyrdom is no wonder.

The legend of the martyrdom of Father Sanvitores illustrates the religious and historical manipulation of the island's past based on the

native's adoption of a Eurocentric perspective. In many of the historical accounts by missionaries, there are one-sided views of the violence of the natives against the Spanish priests and the soldiers. These accounts do not address the cause of the violence to which the natives resisted: the Jesuit priests' disruptions of the class hierarchy, their usurpation of the island's wise men and shamans, and their destruction of the traditional bachelor houses where the Chamorro men lived with unmarried women (Carano 1985, p. 69).

Furthermore, such tales propagate the mentality that history and culture began upon the European arrival. In fact, there was already an elaborate and complex society existing when Magellan came to Guam in 1521. Finally, it is also an example of how the mind of the Chamorro has been so converted to Christianity and Hispanic culture that whatever remained of native culture at this point in colonial history becomes insignificant and pales in comparison with the flourish and ceremony of the Church, because the missionary accounts of "pagan" customs have made the islander appear like a savage to himself (Subramani 1985, p. 79).

**JUAN MALO STORIES: RESISTANCE TALES**

The deeds of the Chamorro trickster Juan Malo, whose last name means "bad" in Spanish, are set during the Spanish occupation. Because Chamorros had been defeated and were controlled by the Spanish, the character of Juan Malo surfaced as they do among oppressed people everywhere. Van Peenen (1974, p. 24) remarked that "too weak to again engage in physical battle, they [Chamorros] entered into mental battle, and, in their thoughts turned into legends, they revenged themselves upon the conqueror." Juan Malo, who was constantly trying to outwit and dupe the Spanish governor and others with the aid of his carabao (water buffalo), was the embodiment of that resistance.

In one situation, Juan Malo is entrusted to care for the governor's three little pigs and take them out to pasture. He takes the pigs to a mudhole, and kills and eats all three, leaving only their hooves. Juan plants the three sets of

hooves in the mudhole so that they stick out of the ground, giving the appearance of their having drowned. He calls the governor and tells him what happened. Juan is able to escape unpunished after enlisting the unsuspecting aid of the governor's daughters (Van Peenen 1974, p. 27).

Another tale tells of how Juan dupes a farmer by stuffing three Spanish pesos into his carabao's nose. When Juan meets the farmer he boasts of how he is the richest man on the island. He proves his wealth by slapping his carabao on the side, forcing the coins out the carabao's nose. The farmer buys the carabao for seventy pesos, and Juan goes off to the cockfights where he loses his new-found wealth (Guam DOE 1981, p. 1-15).

On the surface Juan Malo is a humorous trickster figure who embodies the mentality of the new Chamorro who resents the power of the Spaniards. He is a symbol of resistance and an example of the Chamorro who can no longer battle physically, must defeat his conquerors by outwitting them. Van Peenen (1974, p. 24) claims that Juan Malo expresses the rebirth of the ancient Chamorro sense of humor "which had been submerged under the flood of the conquest." It seems that there is much more to Juan Malo's personae than connecting him with the ancient Chamorro. This deceiving anti-hero is certainly a degeneration of the power figures he has replaced under the imposing and repressive Spanish regime.

I believe that the character of Juan Malo also reflects the influence of Spanish literature in Marianas folklore. Although the trickster motif seems to be a universal theme and exists in other Micronesian tales, Juan Malo may also be an extension of the *picaro* or rogue character in Spanish literature. It may not be coincidental that the anonymous short novel entitled *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published in 1554 in Alcalá, Spain, was the original inspiration of picaresque fiction. Such tales contain rogue and trickster characters who respond to historical or social situations through humor and deception (Bjornson 1977, p. 3). The character of Lazarillo appeared during a period of great religious persecution as well as glaring discrepancies between the life of the aristocrats and the

lower classes. Richard Bjornson (1977, p. 6) comments that the *picaro* is character "who must secure his own survival and psychological well being in a society which openly espouses traditional ideals, while actually sanctioning the most dehumanizing modes of behavior," a situation that might just as well describe the Spanish occupation of the Marianas.

Without discussing the literary connections between the characters of Juan Malo and Lazarillo, it is important to note this possible connection with Spanish literature which also inspired such early English novels as Tobias Smollet's *Roderick Random* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (Bjornson 1977, p. 4). Like Juan Malo, these picaresque characters responded to social events that marginalized a people or culture and forced them into a world where they must survive through wit and deception against overwhelming political force. Although there are many variations and portrayals of the *picaro* character, Juan Malo is the Chamorro example of the colonial situation in the Marianas. The creation of Juan Malo as a miscreant scoundrel was a coping mechanism by which the natives reacted against an oppressive culture that was forcing change upon them.

The use of the Spanish peso in the last tale typifies how the entire cultural system had been altered. There was now a Spanish governor from whom the natives received tokens of value. They no longer could express their own strength through feats for their own people. The colonized Chamorros became subject to Spanish value systems, and they were unable to maintain native customs and practices. Juan's eating of the pigs suggests his dependence on the Spanish for sustenance and livelihood. Juan Malo is not so much the humorous resistance figure that Van Peenen contends he is, but the disempowered result of Spanish Christianization and colonization—the subjugated Chamorro who must live within the confines of his colonial world. And it seems appropriate that his literary representation may have been derived from Spain as well.

## COLONIAL LOVE TALES

### *Legend of the Flame Tree: A Marianas Romeo and Juliet Tale*

The flame tree, renowned for its fire-red blossoms during spring and summer in the Marianas, figures in this tale with certain motifs and themes shared by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. I suggest that the parallels are the result of growing European literary influence in Marianas folklore. Although the theme of star-crossed and forbidden love is fairly universal, this legend is unique because there is no similar parallel in other Micronesian folklore. Love tales from the other islands have motifs connected with the ocean, magic love spells or potions, and animal imagery. But the "Flame Tree" legend is the only example of this particular theme, and it is clearly an example of foreign infusion into native lore. I submit that this legend is Western-influenced because I did not find this plot structure in Spanish literature. It is possible that this motif was introduced later on, and was not part of the Spanish effect in Marianas folklore. Unfortunately, because of the difficulty in ascertaining authenticity and of the recent transcription of the legend, this issue remains unresolved. Besides the fact that no other *Romeo and Juliet* motifs have been found in Micronesia, the Christian images and the *mantilla* (a Spanish veil or head scarf) that figure in the story also reflect the ingrained Hispanic tradition during this period. Thus, because of the ambiguity, discerning this legend's source becomes extremely difficult.

It is not easy to account for the appearance of the *Romeo and Juliet* theme in "The Flame Tree" legend. Stith Thompson's index attributes the source for this tragic and forbidden love motif to the Pyramus and Thisbe traditions of Greek mythology. Other parallels include the Dido and Aeneas love story, and the Italian love story that was Shakespeare's source. More important is the fact that neither Thompson nor Kirtley list any tales along similar thematic lines from Spain. The lack of a Spanish source for this legend might lead one to assume that the legend may in fact be native to the islands. Perhaps the creators of such a tale may have produced this legend as a cultural

love story in the context of a territorial dispute. Obviously this goes against my paper's thesis that most colonial tales' themes reflected the historical Chamorro resistance against the Spanish. However, this legend's stark parallels with Shakespeare's work strongly suggest a nineteenth-century Western adoption of the play into Marianas lore. In this case, the "Flame Tree" legend serves as an example of the adoption of Western literary models in folklore. By creating a legend that tells of the Chamorro's willingness to sacrifice life for the sake of love, this tale speaks to the colonial value systems of patriarchal control, and reflects the encroachment of alien tradition on native culture.

This legend is a major marker in the ever-growing influence of European models on Marianas folklore and literature. It accounts for the origin of the flame tree's colors from the tragedy of forbidden love. In the story, two young lovers of feuding families maintain a clandestine relationship by leaving notes for one another in church. Because of a dispute over a land exchange, the members of each family harbor bitter sentiments against one another. The lovers refuse to heed their parents' wishes and continue their relationship, even whispering, like Pyramus and Thisbe, endearments over a wall. One night they agree to meet, and the young girl, Elena, wearing a white *mantilla* (the usual scarf for mass), arrives early for their meeting by a tree. Her brothers follow her with machetes, hiding in some bushes, ready to attack the suitor, Nicolas. When a wild boar attacks the boys, they slash and wound the enraged animal and run away. Upon hearing the commotion, the frightened Elena flees, leaving the *mantilla* behind. The boar seizes the *mantilla* and rips it up, leaving the scarf blood-stained and tattered. Nicolas arrives and finds the bloodied *mantilla*. Thinking Elena has been killed, Nicholas proclaims he can no longer live without her, and stabs himself with the machete the brothers left behind. Elena returns and finds the dead Nicolas beneath the white blossoms of the tree where they were to meet. She professes her love and kills herself as well. The blood from the two

lovers runs into the roots of the tree, turning the blossoms fiery-red (Guam DOE 82-102).

While there may be various ways to interpret this legend, this analysis will look at it not only as an expression of the colonial Chamorro culture and the universal theme of a feud, but also as a tale influenced by Western literature. It is notable that the lovers meeting in front of a saint's statue alludes to the theme that divine providence determined the tragic fate of the couple because of the feuding. The white *mantilla* symbolized the girl's virginity and innocence, contrasted by the red of the spilled blood. The wall over which they exchanged endearments symbolized a social barrier, as in the families being the barricade of conflicts that keep the two apart. The eventual suicide of the lovers was the line of escape they chose in order to free themselves of a world in which their love was forbidden by their families. It was mentioned in the tale that the color red symbolized either the young, unfulfilled passion of the lovers, or the shame felt by the lovers' parents because of their stubbornness and unwillingness to settle their differences (Guam DOE 1981, p. 102).

I contend that there are too many similarities between the "Flame Tree" legend's plot scheme and Western literary models, for the legend to be native to the Marianas. One may ultimately conclude that the tale was taken directly from Shakespeare's play, or was possibly introduced in the nineteenth century by someone who may have read his work. This is one option. It is also possible that the Western models were appropriate vehicles that articulated Chamorro social issues and conflicts in some ways. Ultimately, it speaks of colonial influence on the culture, and the tragedy that results from the universal motif of territorial disputes.

#### *Two Lovers Point*

Another tale about tragic love during colonial times, the "Legend of Two Lovers Point," is important in this discussion for two reasons: it expresses the Chamorro desire to maintain his own cultural identity against an imposing culture and demonstrates in its modern variant evidence of borrowing from the original tale.

The borrowed variant is based on a novel by Ace Sands in which he extends the legend to a Eurocentric legacy, creating a sort of Byronic hero lover in the form of a Spanish captain. Whereas the original version involved two native Chamorro lovers, Sands changes the story and pits the New World, represented by the Spanish captain, against the native culture, symbolized by the Chamorro girl. Sands has shifted the original legend's point of view from a Chamorro perspective to suit Western and Eurocentric notions of a tragic love story set in paradise. Sands's two lovers were the captain and a Chamorro girl, with the tragedy the forbidden love between two people from opposing cultures.

The traditional tale, recounted in the Guam DOE (1981) version, tells of a girl of Spanish and Chamorro blood known for her beauty and modesty. Her parents, eager to be in the graces of the Spanish aristocracy, arrange to marry her off to the Spanish captain, who was three times her age. The girl is trapped between her aversion to marrying the Spaniard and her father's demands that she obey his wishes. Later, the girl meets a young Chamorro with whom she fell in love. The young couple arrange and maintain a secret relationship, meeting at a high cliff overlooking the ocean. When she tells her parents she does not wish to marry the captain and of her love for the Chamorro youth, they forbid her to leave the house and hasten their own plans for her wedding. The girl manages to escape, and the mother, knowing her daughter has fled, delays notifying her husband for some time to allow the girl to meet with her lover. After the girl's father finds out, he tells the captain she has been kidnapped by a low rowdy and the two, accompanied by a squad of soldiers, set out to search for the lovers. When they find the couple at the secret cliff, the desperate lovers stand at the edge of the precipice and tie their hair together, symbolizing their union. As the captain tries to seize them, the lovers leap off the cliff and perish into the waters below (Guam DOE 1981, p. 188-210).

From this legend came the name *Puntan Dos Amantes*, or "Two Lovers Point" for the cliff overlooking Tumon Bay in Guam. Although

the lovers leaping from a high place is a familiar motif in Thompson's index, in this legend it has particular relevancy to Spanish colonialism.

Not only did the final act of suicide symbolize the lovers' affirmation for each other, it also signified the native disposition against anything associated with the Spanish culture. It was the final rebellion against the imposed values and arranged systems of Spanish patriarchy that the girl and her Chamorro mother were subjected to by her Spanish father.

The Spanish captain and father represent the idea of the Eurocentric, male-dominated, patriarchal value system in which the woman was a subject to the husband/father. The father's word was law that was to be followed and obeyed. The girl, by tying her hair to her Chamorro lover, showed that she did not subscribe to the Spanish social system and of her allegiance to native values.

Unlike the "Flame Tree Legend," this love story illustrates the binary oppositions between the natives and the Spanish. First, there is the relationship between the father, a Spanish aristocrat, and the mother, who was of noble Chamorro blood. Although the mother was of Chamorro nobility, she remained subject to her husband, regardless of her position in the traditional Chamorro social structure. The daughter, who exemplified the first Chamorro-Spanish *mestiza*, represented the amalgamated colonial Chamorro who was no longer the aboriginal native of pre-1521 times. The mere fact that this is a tale with the image of a mixed blood couple suggests that historically, the 1600s and 1700s were a time when the Chamorro was assuming a Hispanic identity and moving away from his native culture.

Because the husband was of landed gentry, he was accorded a high position in island society. His wife's high caste of Chamorri lineage was simply useful for legitimizing his position in the eyes of the natives. Counter to this is the fact that in ancient Chamorro culture, women wielded tremendous economic power—they had rights to property in the form of inheritance and titles, as well as the right to demand anything from a male relative (Cunningham 1980, p. 21). Thus, the husband's property

holdings would really have been dependent on his wife, yet she remained subject to him. Although Lawrence Cunningham (1980, p. 34-35) notes that the ancient Chamorros had a patriarchal organization with chiefs as the heads of clans or villages, women played a significant matrilineal function as well. The Spanish influence reduced the role of women economically to the point of dependence on the husband for livelihood.

The theme of escapism in the form of suicide also brings in the idea of the two lovers desiring to choose death over separation. In their despair at a new society that prevented their union, their tying of their hair was a form of marriage that was consummated with their jumping into the waters below. One may also look at the theme of heights in which the lovers would rather descend into the other world than stay in a high society that would not allow them to be united.

#### LEAVING THE PAST

In the selections of lore from pre-colonial through colonial periods, we can see significant changes and alterations of the folklore as it moved from themes of power, pride, and freedom, to those of trickery and romantic tragedy. They are the historical and political texts that give the unofficial and undocumented perspective by the native regarding his brutalization and conquest by foreigners. However, from the period following the Spanish departure in 1899 up to the period following World War II, the body of literature and folklore, aside from the mentioned anthologies and collections, has been minimal.

In his recent "Bibliography of Contemporary Micronesian Literature," Mark Skinner (1990, pp. 1-2) asserts there is a substantial body of post-World War II indigenous literature, in fact, more than previously thought. However, he notes that it was a major problem separating native writers on Guam from non-native residents (Skinner 1990, p. 5). It is this area in modern literature that will be explored. The aim of the next chapter is twofold: first, it looks at a selection of written novels to examine the types of literature that parallel the historical events and developments of the

Marianas; secondly, it discusses the issue of regional and traditional audience, and native and non-native writers, to look at the direction of writing and literature in the islands.

One reason for the lack of a significant body of native writing, is that the culture, through continuous assumption of other cultures and power-shifts, was unable to compete against the more sophisticated and developed literature of those foreign cultures. Also, the oral traditions during the German and Japanese occupations of the northern islands were of no interest to the foreign administrators, whose focus was economic and military development of the islands. On Guam, the *Guam Recorder*, published by the American naval government, became the sole source in the Marianas for the transcription of the oral myths and tales following the Spanish departure. Many of the entries in the *Recorder* are the source for the two major anthologies of legends and myths on Guam. Conversely, the majority of the texts about the islands have been mostly ethnographic and cultural studies, and few focus on the folklore and literature.

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