

E. ARSENIO MANUEL IN THE MARCOS ERA: LATE 1960s-1986

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This essay narrates the life of anthropologist E. Arsenio Manuel (1909-2003) in the period from the 1960s to 1986, ‘the Marcos Era’. It examines the burst of activity in the years surrounding Manuel’s completion of his Ph.D. in anthropology, when he produced many of his best known books, essays, and even popular works. Less well known is that he also produced a fictional work, a mythologized epic of the nation, at the behest of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. The essay considers the political stakes of Manuel undertaking this work. Finally, it looks into notable minor works he penned thereafter. This is the fifth essay in a series of six that narrates the life of anthropologist E. Arsenio Manuel (1909-2003).¹

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Manuel under Marcos

The date of Ferdinand E. Marcos’ assumption of the presidency on December 30, 1965, is often viewed in history textbooks as the beginning of a new, distinctive era in Philippine history (e.g. Abinales and Amoroso 2017). While this was true in many ways, the contours of a “Marcos Era” did not take shape until about a decade later, insofar as matters of national culture were concerned. To be sure, in his first term Marcos did begin a number of major projects such as the Cultural Center of the Philippines, whose origins date to 1966. But it was not until the 1970s that he

¹ For the first essay, please see *Aghamtao* Vol.29 (2021). The second essay will be in a forthcoming issue. The third, fourth and sixth essays are in this volume.

embarked on his most dramatic, ostentatious ventures into monumentalizing a national culture.

For E. Arsenio Manuel's own life and trajectory, the period from Marcos' election in 1965 to his declaration of Martial Law in 1972 did not constitute a radically new era; instead it was one of continuity along a trajectory the anthropologist himself had set out from well before the mid-1960s. Much of what follows will bear this out. And yet, as I will examine in the following section, the president-turned-dictator would turn out to be a transformational figure both in the history of the country, as well as for the career and scholarship of Manuel.

Now home in the Philippines from Chicago, Manuel turned his attention to a number of essay-length projects on various aspects of his brand of oral traditions-centered anthropology. A few of them, such as, "The Preservation of Filipino Cultural Heritage," "The Archaeological Site of Sam-ang, Toledo City: A Preliminary Report," "Manila Archaeology at the GSIS Site, Parian District," "Minority Groups Deserving Priority for Urgent Research on Luzon, Philippines, a Note," "Man in Time and Space: Archaeology," were brief, scholarly snapshots that report on recent studies or reintroduce older themes (see entries in Manuel 1984:223-229). Of greater significance were substantial essays like his "On the Study of Philippine Folklore," which served as an up-to-date state-of-the-field in Manuel's own understanding of the evolving and maturing discipline (Manuel 1969).

In the late 1960s Manuel branched out to new areas of scholarly production. Most notable in this respect were his translations of some short stories from the Western canon into Tagalog: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," Anton Chekhov's "The Darling," and William Wymark Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw", which he titled "*Ang Mapagkanulong Puso*," "*Ang Mutya*," and "*Ang Kamao ni Matsing*" respectively. While he had hoped that his own works would be translated into the national patois, he had never before this time found utility in translating Western works into a Filipino language, nor in undertaking the labor himself. It was perhaps a reflection of his growing confidence of the interest in local- versus foreign-language cultural materials among Filipinos, although the newfound avocation would turn out to be short-lived as he did not repeat it in his later years. He also wrote "The Beginnings of Philippine Drama," an essay focused on traditions among people in Northern Luzon (Manuel 1984:227-229). These short pieces form interesting curios in the anthropologist's corpus. They recede into

the background with his first major work of the period: his second textualized oral epic.

Agyu: The Ilianon Epic of Mindanao (1969a and 1969b) was in many ways different from its predecessor, *The Maiden of the Buhong Sky*, published a decade prior. First, the field of folklore studies had grown. Manuel dedicated two substantial introductory sections of *Agyu* to charting the outpouring of recent scholarship. The hopeful, even excited tone of these prefatory chapters provides a revealing contrast with the almost clinical tentativeness that introduced *Maiden of the Buhong Sky*. This time Manuel viewed the eventual audience for the text to be in the broader society, beyond the universities (cf. more recent efforts, e.g. Maquiso 2021).

The Philippines in the era of Marcos was increasingly more receptive to the studies of culture he and his colleagues produced. Manuel himself had by that point become a more refined and mature scholar. He had completed his doctorate, ascended to the near apex of the field of anthropology in the country, and supplemented his primary lines of research with numerous shorter works on a variety of subjects. It was with *Agyu*, after decades of scholarship, that Manuel became acknowledged as the authoritative scholar that we recognize him to be today.

Agyu was a different work from *Maiden of the Buhong Sky* for more fundamental reasons too. Manuel recorded it from a Central Mindanao community distant and distinct from that of his first epic. As he put it, with characteristic geographic and cultural punctiliousness,

“*Agyu* is the epic of the Ilianon people of Cotabato del Norte. Ilianon refers also to the language of this people which has its center in the barrios of the municipality of Carmen. The barrios of Libpas, Sarayan, Kibudtungang, Tampad, Durupuan, Lampayan, Simuni, Kipanan, Salat, Mid’ullaran, Balluntu, Langlangasan, including the junction of the Arakan River with the Pulangi’ River, Aruman, Idsabuon, Kidmaadsil, Liliyungan, and Linaw all speak this language.” (Manuel 1969b:30)

His first epic, by contrast,

“...was recorded by us in the last days of May 1956, while on an ethnographic field work among the Bagobos of Davao province, in Datu Duyan’s house at Lumut, on the Dallag plateau, some eighty kilometers by road and trail northwest

of Davao City, a point not far from the divide separating Cotabato and Davao province.” (Manuel 1958a:3)

The tale he put to print in his sophomore effort did not differ greatly in its formalistic qualities. Manuel presented this story, about the travails, battles, and travels of its titular protagonist Agyu, in much the same way that he had its predecessor; it was transcribed into Roman letters, with parallel translation into English, and punctuated with notes throughout, but with fewer explanatory footnotes and other such authorial interjections in the body of the epic itself. Unfortunately however, there was a major printing error, in both the original and second editions. In both versions, the final sections of the epic transcript as well as the early pages of conclusion were omitted—surely unintentionally (see Manuel 1969b:64...81). Manuel noted that the first edition was, “badly proofread, so that a second edition became indispensable” (Manuel 1984:229); however the error was never fixed with that reissue. Manuel’s textualization, *Agyu: The Ilianon Epic of Mindanao*, ranks as among the precious few lengthy Filipino oral traditions to have been committed (via print) to posterity. Yet for these reasons, it will remain forever incomplete.

Manuel also published in the early 1970s, another book project that was of great significance, but appeared without much fanfare: the second volume of the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* (Manuel 1970b). This volume was much like the first, which had appeared fifteen years prior; it contained comprehensive write-ups of a sundry assortment of Filipinos of note, a large number of whom had never been the subject of study anywhere else. As he described its contents,

“In volume II...featured were Juan Luna whose sketch and location list of his paintings is the longest; followed by Fr. Jose Algue, Librada Avelino, Jose Ma. Basa, Ladislao Bonus, Padre Jose A. Burgos, Austin Craig, Fabian de la Rosa, Apolinario de la Cruz, Fr. Federico Faura, Leandro H. Fernandez, Gabriel Beato Francisco, Antonio Garcia (the piano virtuoso), James A Robertson (one of two American editors of *The Philippine Islands*, 55 vols.), Francisco Santiago (pianist and composer), Pedro Serrano Laktaw (lexicographer), Aurelio Tolentino (with the publication for the first time of *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*, the original of which was copied from the original manuscript in the Court Archives of Intramuros before WW II) and others.” (Manuel n.d.:7)

Manuel continued to work on smaller pieces at the same time. For instance he wrote a short essay in which he sought to assess the authenticity of the *Maragtas* (Manuel 1970a). In 1972, he was at last able to bring to final form his MA thesis, which he published as “A Lexicographic Study of Tayabas Tagalog” in the *Diliman Review* (Manuel 1972). The function of this substantial work was to, as he put it,

“promote interest in the development of the national language or Tagalog [via] the enrichment of its vocabulary... the compilation of wordlists in [regional] localities [which] contain words and terms, phrases and expressions... not recorded in existing Tagalog dictionaries.” (Manuel 1984:232)

He considered that such an effort, “would be tremendous and meaningful” for the field of Philippine studies. The second volume of the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* was some five hundred pages and the one on Tayabas Tagalog over four hundred. Manuel had thus put out nearly a thousand pages of scholarship in the first three years of the decade, a quantity comparable to at least three books.

The occasion to write a few retrospective shorter works came about organically as Manuel continued to pursue earlier lines of inquiry. He drafted “American Contributions to Philippine Folklore Studies” as a contribution to a festschrift devoted to Richard M. Dorson² (almost certainly *Folklore Today A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson*, Oinas et al. 1976). The editors requested that Manuel shorten the chapter he submitted, but he did not occasion to do so before their deadline, so his essay did not end up in the published volume (see Manuel 1984:234). A similar convocation, closer to home in more than one way, formed the genesis of his essay, “A Review of Oral Literature Scholarship in Philippine Universities,” which was published in *Dialogue for Development* (Manuel 1975a), the volume that arose from the First Philippine Folklore Congress. It remains one of his more significant lengthy essays (reprinted in the compilation by the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino: Manuel 2019). A similar, much briefer, essay provided the foreword to Mauro Garcia’s *Gabriel A. Bernardo, Librarian, Bibliographer and Scholar* (1974). The occasion of the death of his mentor propelled Manuel to write, “The Wake and Last Rites over H. Otley Beyer,” a short but meaningful ethnography peppered with

² [See Manuel (2023:35).]

reflective asides (Manuel 1975b). These essays are important in their own right as particular interventions. Additionally, because they prompted Manuel to think about the past in a more deeply deliberative way again and again, they seemed to have shaped the tone and trajectory of the book he published soon after, what would turn out to be his final textualized epic.

Tuwaang Attends a Wedding: The Second Song of the Manuvu' Ethnoepic Tuwaang (1975c) places Manuel at the apex of his scholarly career. Its significance lay not only in its recounting of a second Tuwaang story—a singular achievement in its time as it remains now—but furthermore for what the work represents as a quintessential work of national folklore research, a recording in the preeminent genre, brought to the shore by a historically new wind of cultural nationalism, composed by the emergent dean of the field, soon-to-be Chair of Anthropology, at the country's flagship university. Nothing corroborates this signification of the work better than the opening words from its preface:

“Philippine literature as part of world literature is budding and about to flower. Yet full flowering, not many know, had already taken place long ago in many aboriginal gardens. What is needed today is that these flowers of literature be picked and collected steadily and quickly lest they disappear forever. Then we can have a bouquet from every ethnic culture (each an aspect of Philippine literature) that can be made available in both original text and translation for literate men everywhere.” (Manuel 1975c:x)

From the incipient period of *Handiong* and *Vida de Lam-ang* up to the 1970s, oral traditions studies, as independent from anthropology had changed greatly. Its immediate purposes, methods, and wider importance had mutated many times in the decades in between. *Tuwaang Attends a Wedding* signaled in 1975 the extent to which the discipline had grown and matured. It formed Manuel's finest individual work of folklore. This at least is the position in his oeuvre one might accord it today. In the context of that decade, it might have competed with another such work, as we will soon see.

Manuel followed up his epic with a series of short pieces whose breadth display the multiple fields in which he operated. These included: two essays on Manuvu' culture, one an overview of the community and the other a more focused brief piece on property laws. He also penned a duo of essays on “national development”, one that adduces nationality

through a study of ethnicity in the Philippines in broad fashion and another that does so through focusing on cultural minorities specifically. Distinct from either of these studies were one-off writings such as his short etymological study of the Tagalog word for “book” and the various bibliographies he compiled for his classes among other fora. He also tried his hand at publishing for a non-scholarly audience, for instance the essay on Philippine epics he penned for *Pamana*, or the short pieces he wrote (alongside other UP-based academics) for the magazine *Archipelago* (Manuel 1984:236-239, 1978a, 1978b).

In temporal terms, this burst of scholarly activity was the culmination of Manuel’s decades of study, research, and education in anthropology and its subfields and allied disciplines. It also happened to coincide, in the later 1970s especially, with the Philippine government’s programs to promote a “national culture,” in part by undertaking the very sort of scholarship that Manuel and his colleagues pioneered. Because this effort was inextricably bound up with Marcos’s efforts to mythologize the nation with himself at the helm, it was perhaps inevitable that the two would come together in at least some way, which they did in the later 1970s. The extent to which Manuel produced instrumental scholarship not only for his purposes but also for Marcos’ is a fraught question that bears examination.

Manuel for Marcos?

Benedict Anderson’s characterization of Ferdinand Marcos in his canonical essay, “Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams,” usefully captures the rupture the Ilocano cleaved in political history.

“...he was an original; partly because he was highly intelligent, partly because, like his grotesque wife, he came from the lower fringes of the oligarchy. In any case, he was the first elite Filipino politician who saw the possibilities of reversing the traditional flow of power. All his predecessors had lived out the genealogy of mestizo supremacy—from private wealth to state power, from provincial bossism to national hegemony. But almost from the beginning of his presidency in 1965, Marcos had moved mentally out of the nineteenth century, and understood that in our time wealth serves power, and that the key card is the state. Manila’s Louis Napoleon...” (Anderson 1988:20)

The transformation of the realm of politics was analogous to what took place in that of culture, and indeed the two were inseparable at many points. Just as Marcos sought to maximize his authority through manipulating (before 1972) or overturning (after 1972) the bureaucratic machinery of the state, so too did he seek to broaden his powers by operationalizing history (Curaming 2018), building monumental architecture (Lico 2003), and cultivating a cult of personality. This campaign to fabricate a national culture around him reached its height from the mid-1970s to the dawn of the 1980s. It required the labor of the nation's finest scholars, some of whom refused the dictator's overtures, many of whom accepted. Manuel was one of the latter category. His participation in his capacity as the foremost folklorist provides a window into the complicated nature of the uneasy marriage between scholarly work and state power in the Philippines during the martial law era.

As the 1970s wore on and culturally-based research entered the mainstream, Manuel continued to lead the charge. A monumental event in this history was the series *Filipino Heritage: The Making of a Nation* (Roces 1977). The project itself was doubtless inspired by the work of earlier scholars, Manuel among them (Rafael 2013:484). Unsurprisingly, Manuel made a number of contributions to the series, including, fittingly, its lead essay, "In the Beginning...Origin Myths of the Manuvu'." Additional entries provided overviews of folk games, traditional music, and oral traditions (see Manuel 1984:238-39). Cultural researchers of a nationalist bent in the Philippines had operated on the margins dating to as far back, during the modern era, to Isabelo de los Reyes in the 1880s (Scott 1985:245-65). Manuel's brief essays in this volume, and indeed the publication of the volume itself, symbolized that such scholarship had at long last breached the center.

Manuel followed up his contributions to *Filipino Heritage* with a similarly wide-ranging series of writings on culture. Most notable of these was his substantial essay, "Toward an Inventory of Philippine Musical Instruments" (1976). This was essentially an attempt to do for musical instruments what he had done over a decade earlier for oral epics in his seminal survey (1963). Manuel's own description, "Mainly an assessment of the collection of Philippine musical instruments stored at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago," undersells its import (Manuel 1984:240).

The Field Museum of Natural History was then (as now) one of the largest repositories of Philippine material objects anywhere, larger than

most in the Philippines itself (Field Museum 2022). Manuel was one of the handful of scholars who possessed the knowledge and experience to be able to write the essay. He lacked the training in musicology of someone like his contemporary Jose Maceda (1917-2004), but he made up for it with a decades-long engagement with the ethnography and history of the communities who created these instruments. This expertise is evident throughout the piece, which takes the form of an item-by-item listing of instruments in the museum's collection. To these he appended descriptions drawn from a century of mostly anthropological works written in various languages. More akin to an annotated bibliography, it lacks the narrative structure employed in his earlier survey of epics and necessarily requires a mechanical reading. To note this is in no way to detract from what he accomplished: a deeply researched, informative, and systematic accounting of the archipelago's instrumental heritage.³ It remains of great utility for ethnomusicologists and others.

Around the time he was putting to publication "Toward an Inventory of Philippine Musical Instruments," Manuel was at work on a number of smaller, more ephemeral pieces. In general, these writings simply reiterated in concise fashion things he had written elsewhere about history, anthropology, and oral traditions. But a notable exception was his essay, "The Conflict of National and Custom Law in Central Mindanao" (1979). Manuel was moved to write the piece in part because of the illegal seizures of indigenous land he witnessed while conducting fieldwork. It is one of the select handful of things he did in his life where he made use of his background in law. The most tantalizing writing of the ensemble was a piece titled, "Some Considerations in Changing Our Country's Name," which he presented at the UP Faculty Center on December 5, 1978, in response to Parliamentary Bill 195, the Marcosian bill which proposed to change the name of the Philippines to "Maharlika." Sadly this five-page position paper seems to have gone lost. The only information we have about it comes from one of the anthropologist's retrospectives, where he writes, "Two other speakers, Juan R. Francisco and Celedonio Resurreccion, spoke or read papers in favor of the Bill, while my paper was against it" (see Manuel 1984:β240). If only we could discover why.

It was also during this period that he came out with a few significant essays about oral traditions research. One of these, "Philippine Oral Traditions: Theory and Practice" has received far more attention than the

³ [Manuel also encouraged his students to collect material culture on his behalf.]

others. He originally presented the paper at the Third National Folklore Congress in 1976, and it was first published in the volume that arose from the conference in 1978. The work was republished, with only slight changes, in the *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* in 1980. The essay was another primer on oral traditions, the sort of which he had written a number of times on a variety of topics. Readers familiar with Manuel's work would not find much that was new in this essay, with the important exception of a sampling of representative folktales drawn from his private collections that had not seen publication anywhere else before or since. What distinguishes this essay from its predecessors is the facility with which he elucidates the subject. Whereas in much of his scholarship he is serious and workmanlike, here he is fluidly conversational as he describes the field, its history, and larger purpose. In the introduction to the essay, he casually relates his biography and scholarly upbringing as it relates to his interests in folklore. It is one of the rare instances in which he describes his own life. Of the many such introductory essays he has penned throughout his life, it is perhaps the most accessible.

His other writings on oral traditions from around 1980 have received comparatively less attention. In the cases of two of these, "Historical Folkloristics in Philippine Studies" and "The Filipino Experience in Epic Literature: A Developing Vision," it is because Manuel never found occasion to publish them anywhere after first presenting them at public events. Another, "The Epic in Philippine Literature" did see the light of print, in the *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* in 1980. The purpose of this essay was to take stock of how the effort to record epics and to use them as the basis for a national literature—a proposal he first put to pen a quarter century earlier (see Manuel 1955b)—had proceeded up to that time. It is a valuable state-of-the-field essay that updated his earlier "Survey of Philippine Epics" (1963) by listing all of the epics that had been recorded, published, or were awaiting such in the intervening quarter century. Manuel makes a compelling case that epic literature had made great strides in the preceding years. And yet, he writes, "I have estimated that only about one-tenth of these oral gems have been recorded" (Manuel 1980c:336-37). If true, it challenges the imagination to conceive of what it would take to collect the other ninety percent.

Manuel's expertise as an anthropologist, folklorist, and perhaps especially as 'Dean of Filipino epics', led to his undertaking scholarship for Marcos, and Imelda. They had embarked on a number of cultural efforts to broaden and refine Ferdinand's rule and, of course, to satiate his

grandiose sense of self. One component of this campaign involved remaking Filipino history into a medium whose dynamics would pave the way for Filipino leaders precisely like him and his spouse. Towards that end, he commissioned a coffee table-type book that portrayed the conjugal dictators⁴, in characteristically ostentatious fashion, as the mythic rulers of the country. Little concrete evidence exists about how Filipinos received the resulting volume, *Si Malakas at Si Maganda*, when it appeared in 1980 (Ramos 1980). One wonders if it suffered the fate of every other book in the genre (Jurilla 2008:Chap.2). Nearly impossible to get one's hands on today, it exists as a rarer footnote than others in the scarce academic works that recall the work at all. It is however notable for its own purposes, not the least of which is to narrate, alongside similar works, the Philippines' foremost oral traditionalist's single attempt to create a literary, national epic. Manuel titled it, "*Ang Darangan ni Pamulingan*" ['The Epic of Pamulingan'].

Greater details about the history of the project itself are wanting. One wonders how it was that any of the participants who signed on agreed to do so; and if there were others who were approached but declined. In one place, Manuel describes at some length how he personally came to be involved. But his account leaves unclear how his points of contact connected with (and indeed worked on the express behest of) the conjugal dictators—a fact to which he was certainly not ignorant. He writes,

“Then came 1979. A prestigious lady in high society in Manila was introduced to me by the dean of the graduate school of the University of Santo Tomas. Her name was Remedios Ramos. This lady wanted to enlist three people to write a book, and this was to be written in Tagalog, i.e. the national language. After the dean had identified two other names in her faculty (Florentino H. Hornedo and Norma G. Tiangco), we decided the format and contents of the project in a sitting. I agreed to outline the work to be done, and in the second meeting the three of us discussed our parts. These were approved by Mrs. Ramos. After ten to twelve months of research, we were ready to write our parts. After eighteen months, I submitted ‘*Darangan ni Pamulinang*,’ an epic in form and in Tagalog verse. The other two also submitted theirs. After several consultations and meetings with an artist, the book was illustrated in full colors and published as

⁴ [Cf. Mijares 1976]

a coffee-table book. This is the first serious work I undertook in the vernacular, for the love poems of early youth had long been forgotten. The book is titled *Si Malakas at Si Maganda* (Manuel 1989:167-68).

Much here is left unsaid, including what type of poem Ramos wanted them to write, how she came to the position as the editor, how they would be paid, and so on. The paramount issue is also elided: what the greater purpose behind the book was in the first place. Reading this passage, one would have no idea whatsoever that this book was one component of the broader campaign to mythologize Ferdinand and Imelda—which it undeniably was (Rafael 2000).

Manuel mentions his collaboration on *Si Malakas at Si Maganda* in two other places, to describe what he conceived of the epic to be, in strictly formal terms. In one essay he describes his “*Ang Darangan ni Pamulingan*” as, “based mainly on Philippine oral traditions from the north to the south of the country in the form of myths, legends, folktales, and epics songs” (Manuel 1984:243). The description, which he wrote some time in the late 1990s, provides a complementary rationale.

“A creative work of Mr. Manuel in epic form is not well-known because it appeared in a coffee-table [*sic*] book. This work should be mentioned here to more record more roundedly his contributions to folklore studies. In his “*Darangan ni Pamulingan*,” in Tagalog verse, he versified the myths and legends, folktales and epics songs, into a unified whole to recite the heroic story of the ancestors of the Filipino people in 1,874 lines. He thinks that while composers like Nicanor Abelardo, Francisco Santiago, Elliseo Pajaro, Felipe de Leon and others have made use of folksongs to convert them into serious musical compositions like symphonies and operas, why cannot this be done to oral lore? This work was published in a coffee-table book with the title *Si Malakas at si Maganda* (J.Y. Vargas [*sic*, should be Ramos], 1980, though his work and those of Florentino Hornedo and Norma Tiongson [*sic*, should be Tiangco] are not so identified individually.” (Manuel n.d.:5)

This entry appears in a listing of what he classed as his contributions “In the Field of Folklore.” It differs from the preceding entry, in a revealing way. In the preceding entry, which lays out his contributions to the Dorson volume on global folktales (1975), he describes something of how he

came to be involved in the book's production; he even mentions Dorson by name as he does so. In other words, he felt it necessary, relevant, to mention the individual who stood at the helm and whose efforts ultimately made possible the work Manuel contributed—the sort of calculus that any good biographer can easily solve with mental math. What is one to make of Manuel not explaining, in even a few words, how he came to serve as a mythologizer for the country's first dictator? Was his attempt to remember "*Ang Darangan ni Pamulingan*" here and in his earlier description merely formal terms an attempt to forget? Was the epic a genuine work of art or pure propaganda?

Some indications of Manuel's thinking about his participation in a volume the conjugal dictatorship commissioned can be found by examining the text itself. Written in elevated, literary Tagalog, the epic comprises 1,874 lines of verse, including the introductory and concluding "songs." Those lines are sectioned off into sixteen chapters, which are themselves further divided into stanzas of variable length. Uncounted in the total is the glossary of key terms that explains not only specialized terms in the epic but many of its several characters. It is also lavishly illustrated, as anonymously painted scenes puncture the narrative (as is true for Manuel's co-contributors' stories in the volume as well). In formalistic and significant terms, it is certainly an "epic" work: written, printed, and illustrated to elevate and valorize something, or many things; the question is what.

To gain insight into Manuel's thinking about this engagement with the Marcoses, one might turn to the text itself. Seen from one angle, Manuel was not by any means engaging in a historically novel undertaking. The act of studying and/or recording epics and then using that research to fuel creative literary works had been a well-established, if still rare, practice before the 1970s: after recording *Vida de Lam-ang*, Isabelo de los Reyes went on to write short fiction like *Ang Singing ng Dalagang Marmol* (1905), and Amador T. Daguio wrote most of his poetry after recording an Ifugao epic in 1952 towards the completion of his MA in English at Stanford. It would be impossible, and unjust, to attempt to analyze the epic in a few words. But perhaps one feature worth noting is the wide variety of characters that populate the story. Whereas most Filipino epics (and indeed most epics outside the country) center on the actions of one or a couple of protagonists, "*Ang Darangan ni Pamulingan*" is instead a story about a dozen or so. Greater space is devoted to main characters like the Manama (chief god of the unbaptized), his envoy, the titular Pamulingan,

and the demon king Oggasi. Such a cast of characters would be par for the course in any number of Filipino epics. The difference arises when, along the way, major figures from Filipino mythology like Agyu and Lam-ang, and history, such as Lakandula and Rajah Suliman, make appearances; and quite often they do so in ways that do not advance the plot. In terms of characterization, then, the epic is more akin to Rizal's *Noli* than it is any given Tuwaang story. That Manuel wanted to shoehorn so many of the greats from the Filipino past into his literary epic, against the conventions of format he knew better than almost anyone, indicates a desire to realize his own dreams of making a truly national epic (cf. Manuel 1975c:7). "*Ang Darangan ni Pamulingan*" forms Manuel's answer in 1980 to his own calls to collect epics and create a national literature in the 1950s. The text makes clear that his fealty was to his deeply held ideals—and not to the political exigencies of the ultimate editor in chief.

The most definitive statements on this matter come from Manuel's daughter, Corazon A. Manuel, herself an epic scholar in her own right, who in her MA thesis uncovered the legend of Tabagka or Matabagka, the Philippines' lone epic heroine, so far (Manuel 1976). In our interview, she recounts that her father possessed a generally unfavorable opinion about Marcos himself given his termination of democracy in the Philippines. Although as a biographer, Manuel appreciated Marcos' historic role as a head of state, and sought in his life to acknowledge such in works like the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*. When it came to the work the conjugal dictators had commissioned him to complete, Corazon claims that Manuel was dismissive of the typical criticisms. This was because, as he saw it, Imelda was the decisive actor in commissioning the work, not her husband, so the potential that it might in serve to bolster his rule was more oblique. More importantly, an epic was a work of fiction, of mythology.

As Corazon described her father's thinking, any links between the physical world of a Marcos "presidency" in 1980 with the epic text he created would be purely imaginative. It would be a fool's errand to equate the two. Perhaps Ferdinand, or Imelda, might have tried to portray the "biographies" that Manuel and his co-contributors created as their own. But as Corazon has it, her father would have thought it nonsensical for them to do so (pers. comm. Corazon A. Manuel 2020).

It is easy to look back at the profound and pervasive corruption of the Marcos regime and question the scholarship it sponsored, even to impugn

the motives of those who chose to work with the dictator, and disregard their studies outright (see Azurin 1995:139-41). A recent study by historian Rommel A. Curaming of the *Tadhana* project (1970s-1986), Marcos's attempt to commission an authoritative history of the Philippines, highlights the complicated, multifaceted nature of the nexus between scholars and official power. As he finds,

“In my own assessment, it was a decolonialising historiography par excellence. It was very notable for anticipating some of the key issues such as colonial discourse, and ‘provincializing’ or decentering Europe that became faddish in the post-colonial or decolonial literature from the 1980s and 1990s... In addition to the overall quality, I also want to stress the leverage the scholars enjoyed in deciding the content and approaches. Keenly aware of the uneasy relations between the state and Filipino scholars, Marcos must have appreciated the need for caution and delicacy. He could not be seen or sensed as manipulating without risking that some scholars would leave the project.”
(Curaming 2018:244)

A cursory examination of Manuel and his co-authors' contributions to *Si Malakas at Si Maganda* portrays a similar dynamic. The work served the ultimate ends of both parties—the authors and the dictators—in different ways. The book's narratives made it into a rich, distinctive, compelling creation that reflected the genius of its authors. At the same time, there can be little doubt that such a beautifully crafted book, structured as it was around a mythologized Filipino past, adorned with luscious illustrations of the conjugal dictators, did in fact work to further the cult of personality they sought to deliberately cultivate—and thereby abet the malgovernance and violence they unleashed on the Philippines.

In any case, in the *longue durée* that was his life, Manuel's contribution to the Marcos volume was but another among so many, numerable works. “*Ang Darangan ni Pamulingan*” was neither an act of villainy nor virtue but something more complicated than either, and its appearance did little to reshape his own scholarship or the dynamics of the world around him. He would continue after its publication much as he had done before. Following his literary epic, Manuel published varied pieces including: a primer on folklore that was perhaps a precursor to his *Guide for the Study of Philippine Folklore* (1985), which he would publish soon after. Others served as contributions to the wider field of folklore. He wrote a

retrospective essay on Dean Fansler, to introduce the volume *Philippine Folk Literature* (Eugenio 1982), the first volume of what would become arguably the definitive series on Philippine oral traditions. He wrote a review of folklorist Hazel Wrigglesworth's *An Anthology of Ilianen Manobo Folktales*, and a conference paper on using oral traditions to discern historic place-names. Alongside these, he drafted a series of short works on topics such as Manuvu' conceptions of property and land ownership, etymology, conflicts over the land between upland groups and the Philippine state, and a (positive) book review of Nicanor G. Tiongson's study (1982) of the *komedya* (Manuel 1984:244-47).

It is often remarked that artists seldom receive recognition in their lifetimes. One measure of Manuel's success as an academic can be seen in the fact that his career occasioned not one but two festschrifts, the first in 1969 and the second culled from papers presented to the Fifth Philippine Folklore Society Congress and published in 1984 as a special issue of the *Philippine Humanities Review*. Although the contributions to the volume by the various contributors are valuable in their own right, in some ways the most valuable contribution is Manuel's own, "A Checklist of the Writings of E. Arsenio Manuel, 1933-1983," deceptively simple though the title might seem. In the piece he begins by narrating a substantial, though by no means exhaustive, autobiography of his personal and scholarly life. He then follows it up with what has turned out to be the only near-definitive, published bibliography of his writings. I say "definitive" here because after writing this list he realized that he had forgotten to list a few smaller works and also, because it appeared in 1984, the bibliography necessarily did not include works he would publish after (although he references a few of the ones he was in the process of bringing to publication). It is one of the rare, vital documents that sheds light on his consequential life of nearly a century (hence I have relied on it repeatedly throughout this essay).

It was towards the sunset of the Marcos Era that Manuel at long last found occasion to publish his *Guide for the Study of Philippine Folklore* (1985). The need for such a book had been apparent for decades. Up to the time Manuel earned his MA in anthropology in 1954, no one had written a primer on how to undertake folklore research, despite that Isabelo de los Reyes jump-started the modern discipline in the late 1880s. None of the authors of the major works in folklore thereafter—de los Reyes, Fansler, Beyer—ever saw fit to publish their handbooks. Thus it was left to Filipinos after independence, to someone like Manuel, to do

so. He completed the preliminary drafts of the core of this book as early as 1964, which he distributed in mimeographed form for students to use in his "Philippine Folklore" course (Manuel 1984:223). That sufficed for his purposes for some time. But after a few of their national convocations, his colleagues at the Philippine Folklore Society urged him to turn his loose papers into a formal textbook.

True to its title, the *Guide for the Study of Philippine Folklore* is a useful primer for untrained, aspiring oral traditionalists. In simple language it describes the steps to gain the tools for conducting research, how to work in the field, and how to process, conserve, analyze, and disseminate one's findings. This in under forty pages, roughly eighty percent of the book. The remainder consists of various documents related to the institutional history of the Philippine Folklore Society: its constitution, a brief overview of its history, addresses from its conferences, lists of officers, and a bibliography of its members' own works. It is not often that one finds key documents that lay out the institutional history of a field in a country appended to textbooks intended for use in introductory courses. The idiosyncratic structure of the book reflects Manuel's parallel but mutually supporting efforts to build up a field, a corps of practitioners, and a broader audience outside of academia.

The Marcos Era saw Manuel's ultimate maturation as a scholar. By this time, certain strains of cultural nationalism had at last become mainstream in the Philippines. After decades of willful or unwitting neglect, the highest levels of government now began to take seriously research into the archipelago's diverse cultures. Although academics were by no means the only agents in this story, it was also propelled by their cumulative scholarship and years of politicking. A downside was that such sponsorship was at this point ad hoc, dependent on the Marcoses' whims.

In this period, Manuel published: his third recorded epic, the definitive survey of Filipino musical instruments, a literary verse epic, a how-to guide for oral traditions research, and the third installment of the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*, not to mention the numerous essays and smaller pieces all throughout. He also took part in his second festschrift. If one sets aside major events such as his retirement from the UP in 1976 (after which he continued to teach for years anyhow) and turns to only the major works he was able to publish from the mid-1970s to 1986, his achievements are formidable.

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