



CHAPTER VI: LITERATURE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN VISAYAS



Objectives:

- Study the historical background of Central and Eastern Visayas literature.
- Read literary texts representing Central and Eastern Visayas.
- Analyze and evaluate the great literary works from Central and Eastern Visayas.
- Write analysis and reflection papers on literary texts.
- Express appreciation in reading Central and Eastern Visayas literary texts.



Lesson 1: Literature in Central Visayas

Cebuano literature refers to the body of oral and written literature of speakers of Cebuano, the mother tongue of a quarter of the country's population who live in Cebu, Bohol, Siquijor, Negros Oriental, and parts of Leyte and Mindanao. As such, it is an important part of Philippine literature.

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Cebuanos have a rich oral tradition, including legends associated with specific locales, like the Maria Cacao legends of southern Cebu and those of Lapulapu and his father Datu Manggal of Mactan; and folktales like the fable “Haring Gangis ug Haring Leon”, which warn of abusive behavior by the dominant group. Many of the tales carry lessons, but just as many suggest the value of humor, keeping of one’s wit and resourcefulness, as in the Juan Pusong trickster tales.

Among the early poetic forms are *garay* (verses), *harito* (shaman’s prayers), *tigmo* (riddles) and *panultihon* (proverbs), as described by the Jesuit Francisco Alzina (1668). The generic form for poetry is *balak*, characterized by the presence of enigma or metaphor called *balaybay* or *sambingay*. Most of the poems are sung, like the occupational songs and lullabies. The *balitaw* is an extemporaneous poetic debate between man and woman that is sung and danced simultaneously. Spontaneous versifying is highly valued, also illustrated in a dramatic form called *kulilising hari*, a variant of the Tagalog *duplo*, that is usually performed at funeral wakes.

The written literature became significant only in the late 19th century. Tomas de San Geronimo’s “Soneto sa Pagdayeg can Santa Maria Gihapon Virgen” (1751) is the first of many piety-laden compositions that show a loss of the enigmatic symbol and metaphor of pre-colonial verse. The longest poetic form is the *pasyon*, a verse rendering of the life and suffering of Jesus Christ that is read during Lent. Secular narratives or *corridos* were composed in Cebuano, but only the prose versions survive, like “Doce Pares sa Pransiya” and “Sa Pagmando ni Hari Arturo.” Another important influence of the Spanish period is found in the plays called *linambay* (known also as *moromoro* because of its anti-Muslim theme), a regular fare at town fiestas that involved participation of the whole rural community and attracted audiences from the neighboring towns.

The prose narratives developed into the *sugilanon* or short story, the first example of which is “Maming”(1901) by Vicente Sotto, the “father of Cebuano letters”; and later into the *sugilambong* or novel. The press contributed much to the development of literature by regularly publishing works of local writers, especially in the three decades before World War II. The Cebuano writer’s craft was honed in early translations of European fiction and imitations of American models, as shown in the works of Juan Villagonzalo, Uldarico Alviola, Angel Enemecio, Flaviano Boquecosa, Sulpicio Osorio, Nicolas Rafols and others. Pre-Commonwealth fiction was mostly nationalistic and didactic in spirit, to be replaced later by more escapist fare like stories of love, detection and adventure. A similar shift was seen in drama, but the more



popular plays were a combination of social criticism and entertainment, as in the works of Buenaventura Rodriguez, Piux Kabahar and Florentino Borromeo.

With the proliferation of publications, e.g., Bag-ong Kusog, Nasud, and Babaye, more and more poets emerged, producing around 13,000 poems before the war. Vicente Ranudo's "Hikalimtan?" (1906) and "Pag-usara" (1922) became models of metrical precision and balanced structure as found in traditional Cebuano poetry. Its discourse of courtly love and its elevated tone would be replicated in the poems of Amando Osorio, Escolastic Morre, Tomas Bagyo, Pantaleon Kardenas, Vicente Padriga and others.

Popular were light folksy pieces of political satires like Andres Bello's fable "Piniliay sa mga Isda" (1916) and of social criticism like Piux Kabahar's "Kinabuhing Sugboanon" (1929). Of another type are the mostly occasional and non-sentimental works of poets Emiliano Batiancila, Canuto Lim, Felipe de Leon, Vicente Kyamko, Marciano Camacho, Saturnino Abecia, Marciano Peñaranda; and Gardeopatra Quijano, a CCP Gawad recipient for Regional Literature (1993). At the center of this group was the prolific Aglipayan bishop Fernando Buyser, who invented the sonnet form called sonanoy. Another invention was the siniloy of Diosdado Alesna, which is made up of one or two amphibrach lines.

Of the many publications before the war, only Bisaya has survived as literary outlet of Cebuano. Because of the rise in prestige of English and later Tagalog, postwar Cebuano literature was relegated to third class although Cebuano was still the language of home and street. A new vigor in poetry was contributed by bilingual writers Leonardo Dioko, Junne Cañizares, Ric Patalinjug and others, whose exposure to Western modes and styles helped strengthen the poetic utterance with irregular rhythms, precise and concrete diction and practical attitudes.

It is in drama that Cebuano literature is probably weakest, although a few writers like Claude Al Evangelio and Allan Jayme Rabaya have sustained their writing. Beset by considerations peculiar to writing for theater, like rarity in publication and answering to the demands of the stage, Cebuano playwrights have slowly turned to radio- and TV-scriptwriting. Most of the plays are written and produced on campus, for a limited audience. There is a renewed interest in the play, however, with the support of the Arts Council of Cebu, that has launched a program to encourage Cebuano playwrights with a contest and the production of the prize-winners.

Writers' groups certainly contributed to literary growth, notably the Lubas sa Dagang Bisaya (LUDABI) and Bathalan-ong Halad sa Dagang (BATHALAD), which have chapters in Mindanao. The latter is an offshoot of the former, which was at one time headed by Marcel Navarra, the "father of the modern short story in Cebuano." By sponsoring regular workshops and contests and publishing their outputs and entries, these groups have encouraged younger writers to start writing, and older writers to shift in style and attitude. Some of the most-anthologized members of BATHALAD are Gremer Chan Reyes, Ernesto Lariosa, Temistokles Adlawan, Pantaleon Auman and Rene Amper. Amper, who used to write in English, is joined by Simeon Dumdum Jr., Vicente Bandillo, Melito Baclay, Ester Tapia and others who now write also in Cebuano.

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Like this second set of bilingual writers, many other Cebuanos started out in the campus papers, like the poets Robert Pableo Lim, Don Pagusara, Leo Bob Flores and Rex Fernandez in the 70s and 80s; as well as the recent crop consisting of Mike Obenieta, Adonis Durado and Januar Yap who are members of the Tarantula group. A noteworthy addition is the Women in Literary Arts (WILA), founded in 1991 by seven women writers. Perhaps the only organized women writers' group in the Philippines today, WILA has twenty-five writers, half of whom write mainly in Cebuano, like Ester Tapia, Ruby Enario, Leticia Suarez, Linda Alburo, Jocelyn Pinzon, Cora Almerino, Delora Sales and Marvi Gil.

Most if not all of these writers have attended the annual Cornelio Faigao Memorial Writers Workshop conducted since 1984 by the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos. These workshops, which the Cebuano writers may attend as fellows a few times and as observers any number of times, provide a venue for the old and young, male and female to share works and discuss problems. For lack of regular outlet, they hold formal and informal poetry readings with varied audiences. BATHALAD, WILA and Tarantula conduct workshops both for their own members and for much younger writers in high schools and colleges.

Famous Literary Work in Central Visayas

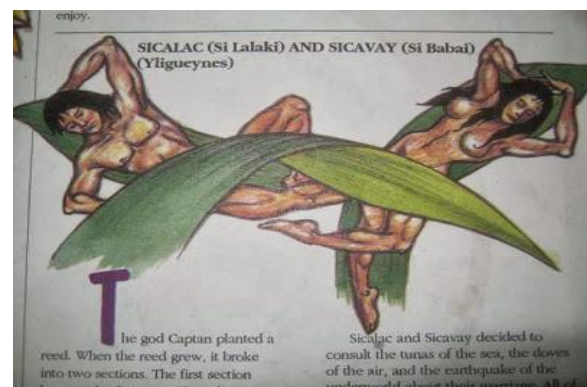
🌈 Ancient literature (Myth) "Sicalac and Sicavay"

The story of Sicalac and Sicavay is a central Visayan myth explaining the origin of the first man. The following story is taken from the book, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1503, Vol. V., 1582-1583*, edited by Emma Helen Blair. It is an account of various Spanish explorers on the geography of the Philippines and the various mythological stories they encountered. Sicalac and Sicavay is a story among the Pintados, who are described as fair-skinned people whose males decorate their whole body with tattoos. These lived in the islands of central Visayas (Cebu, Bohol, Leyte).

The story also explains the origin of the islands Cebu and Samar, the origin of concubinage, and the origin of stealing.

Sicalay and Sicavay Central Visayas Creation Myth

The people of the coast, who are called the Yligueynes [Hiligaynons, or the Ilonggos], believe that heaven and earth had no beginning, and that there were two gods, one called Captan and the other Maguayen. They believe that the land breeze and the sea breeze were married; and that the land breeze brought forth a reed, which was planted by the



god Captan. When the reed grew, it broke into two sections, which became a man and a woman. To the man they gave the name of Sicalac, and that is the reason why men from that time on have been called lalac [lalaki, man]; the woman they called Sicavay, and thenceforth women have been called babayes [babae, woman].

One day the man asked the woman to marry him, for there were no other people in the world; but she refused, saying that they were brother and sister, born of the same reed, with only one knot between them; and that she would not marry him, since he was her brother. Finally they agreed to ask advice from the tunnies [tuna fishes] of the sea, and from the doves of the air; they also went to the earthquake, who said that it was necessary for them to marry, so that the world might be peopled. They married, and called their first son Sibon [Cebu]; then a daughter was born to them, and they gave her the name of Samar. This brother and sister also had a daughter, called Lupluban. She married Pandaguan, a son of the first pair, and had a son called Anoranor.

Pandaguan was the first to invent a net for fishing at sea; and, the first time when he used it, he caught a shark and brought it on shore, thinking that it would not die. But the shark died when brought ashore; and Pandaguan, when he saw this, began to mourn and weep over it—complaining against the gods for having allowed the shark to die, when no one had died before that time. It is said that the god Captan, on hearing this, sent the flies to ascertain who the dead one was; but, as the flies did not dare to go, Captan sent the weevil, who brought back the news of the shark's death. The god Captan was displeased at these obsequies to a fish. He and Maguayen made a thunderbolt, with which they killed Pandaguan; he remained thirty days in the infernal regions, at the end of which time the gods took pity upon him, brought him back to life, and returned him to the world.

While Pandaguan was dead, his wife Lupluban became the concubine of a man called Maracoynon; and these people say that at that time concubinage began in the world. When Pandaguan returned, he did not find his wife at home, because she had been invited by her friend to feast upon a pig that he had stolen; and the natives say that this was the first theft committed in the world. Pandaguan sent his son for Lupluban, but she refused to go home, saying that the dead do not return to the world. At this answer Pandaguan became angry, and returned to the infernal regions. The people believe that, if his wife had obeyed his summons, and he had not gone back at that time, all the dead would return to life.

Lesson 2: Literature in Eastern Visayas

Eastern Visayas is composed of the islands of Samar, Leyte, Biliran and the smaller outlying islands. In terms of political divisions, it is made up of six provinces, namely Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, Samar, Biliran, Leyte, and Southern Leyte. As of Census 1995, the region's total population stood at 3.5 million with Leyte having the highest population concentration at 1.5 million, and Biliran, the smallest population at 132 thousand.

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The region is humid, and has no definite wet and dry seasons. It is generally agricultural and its main crops include coconut, banana, potatoes, cassava, abaca, and sugarcane. Its other source of income is fishing. Frequent occurrences of typhoons have perennially disturbed the economy of the region but people seem to have adapted well enough.

The City of Tacloban is the major center of trade and commerce and education in the region.

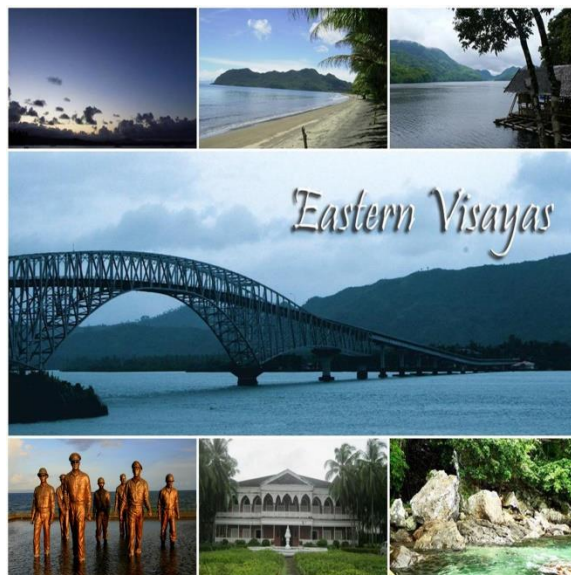
The literature of Eastern Visayas refers to the literature written in Waray and Cebuano by writers from the region. Of the two, it is Waray literature that has been collected, recorded, and documented by scholars and researchers, a movement largely spurred by the interest of German priests, managing a university in Tacloban City, who saw the necessity of gathering and preserving the literary heritage of the region. It is in this light that whenever East Visayan literature is written about, it is usually Waray literature that is being described.

Earliest accounts of East Visayan literature date back to 1668 when a Spanish Jesuit by the name of Fr. Ignacio Francisco Alzina documented the poetic forms such as the candu, haya, ambahan, canogon, bical, balac, siday and awit. He also described the susumaton and posong, early forms of narratives. Theater tradition was very much in place – in the performance of poetry, rituals, and mimetic dances. Dances mimed the joys and activities of the ancient Waray.

With three centuries of Spanish colonization and another period of American occupation, old rituals, poetic forms and narratives had undergone reinvention. A case in point is the balac, a poetic love joust between a man and a woman. According to Cabardo, the balac retained its form even as it took new names and borrowed aspects of the languages of the colonizers. During the Spanish period, the balac was called the amoral; during the American occupation, it was renamed ismayling, a term derived from the English word “smile.” According to a literary investigator, in certain areas of Samar, the same balac form or ismayling has been reinvented to express anti-imperialist sentiments where the woman represents the motherland and the man, the patriot who professes his love of country.

Modern East Visayan literature, particularly Waray, revolves around poetry and drama produced between the 1900s and the present. The flourishing economy of the region and the appearance of local publications starting in 1901 with the publication of *An Kaadlawon*, the first Waray newspaper, saw the flourishing of poetry in Waray.

In Samar, *Eco de Samar y Leyte*, a long running magazine in the 1900s, published articles and literary works in Spanish, Waray and English. A noteworthy



feature of this publication was its poetry section, *An Tadtaran*, which presented a series of satirical poems that attacked the changing values of the people at the time. Eco likewise published occasional and religious poems.

In *Leyte*, *An Lantawan*, which has extant copies from 1931 to 1932, printed religious and occasional poetry. It also published satirical poems of Bagong Katipunero, Luro, Datoy Anilod, Marpahol, Vatchoo (Vicente I. de Veyra), Julio Carter (Illuminado Lucente), Ben Tamaka (Eduardo Makabenta), and Kalantas (Casiano Trinchera). Under these pseudonyms, poets criticized corrupt government officials, made fun of people's vices, and attacked local women for adopting modern ways of social behavior..

With the organization of the Sanghiran San Binisaya in 1909, writers as well as the ilustrados in the community banded together for the purpose of cultivating the Waray language. Under the leadership of Norberto Romualdez Sr, Sanghiran's members had literary luminaries that included Illuminado Lucente, Casiano Trinchera, Eduardo Makabenta, Francisco Alvarado, Juan Ricacho, Francisco Infectana, Espiridion Brillo, and statesman Jaime C. de Veyra. For a time, Sanghiran was responsible for the impetus it gave to new writing in the language.

The period 1900 to the late fifties witnessed the finest Waray poems of Casiano Trinchera, Illuminado Lucente, Eduardo Makabenta, and the emergence of the poetry of Agustin El O'Mora, Pablo Rebadulla, Tomas Gomez Jr., Filomeno Quimbo Singzon, Pedro Separa, Francisco Aurillo, and Eleuterio Ramoo. Trinchera, Lucente, and Makabenta were particularly at their best when they wrote satirical poetry.

The growing acceptance of English as official language in the country strengthened these writers' loyalty to the ethnic mother tongue as their medium for their art. The publication of *Leyte News* and *The Leader* in the twenties, the first local papers in English, brought about the increasing legitimization of English as a medium of communication, the gradual displacement of Waray and eventual disappearance of its poetry from the pages of local publications.

Where local newspapers no longer served as vehicles for written poetry in Waray, the role was assumed by MBC's DYVL and local radio stations in the seventies. Up to the present time, poetry sent to these stations are written mostly by local folk – farmers, housewives, lawyers, government clerks, teachers, and students. A common quality of their poetry is that they tend to be occasional, didactic, and traditional in form. The schooled writers in the region, unlike the local folk poets, do not write in Waray nor Filipino. Most of them write in English although lately there has been an romantic return to their ethnic mother tongue as the medium for their poetry.

Waray drama was once a fixture of town fiestas. Its writing and presentation were usually commissioned by the hermano mayor as part of festivities to entertain the constituents of the town. Town fiestas in a way sustained the work of the playwright. In recent years, this is no longer the case. If ever a play gets staged nowadays, it is essentially drawn from the pool of plays written earlier in the tradition of the *hadi-hadi* and the *zarzuela*.

According to Filipinas, an authority on the Waray zarzuela, the earliest zarzuela production involved that of Norberto Romualdez' *An Pagtabang ni San Miguel*, which was staged in Tolosa, Leyte in 1899. The zarzuela as a dramatic form enthralled audiences for its musicality and dramatic action. Among the noteworthy playwrights of this genre were Norberto Romualdez Sr., Alfonso Cinco, Iluminado Lucente, Emilio Andrada Jr., Francisco Alvarado, Jesus Ignacio, Margarita Nonato, Pedro Acerden, Pedro Separa, Educardo Hilbano, Moning Fuentes, Virgilio Fuentes, and Agustin El O'Mora.

Of these playwrights, Iluminado Lucente stands out in terms of literary accomplishment. He wrote about thirty plays and most of these dealt with domestic conflicts and the changing mores of Waray society during his time. Although a number of his longer works tend to be melodramatic, it was his satirical plays that are memorable for their irony and humor, the tightness of their plot structure, and the specious use of language.

The hadi-hadi antedates the zarzuela in development. It used to be written and staged in many communities of Leyte as part of town fiesta festivities held in honor of a Patron Saint. It generally dealt with Christian and Muslim kingdoms at war. Today one hardly hears about hadi-hadi being staged even in the Cebuano speech communities of the region.

Fiction in Waray has not flourished because it lacks a venue for publication.

Cebuano literature produced in Eastern Visayas is still undocumented terrain. To the writers from the Cebuano speech communities in the region, Cebu City is their center. It is thus not surprising if much of the literature from these communities, particularly fiction and poetry, have found their way into Cebu City's publications. Known Cebuano writers of Leyte like Eugenio Viacrusis, Angel Enemecio, Enemecio Fornarina, and Fernando Buyser first published their fiction and poetry in Cebu publications, and their works have afterward formed part of the literary anthologies in the Cebuano language.

Famous Literary Work in Easter Visayas

🚩 Ancient literature (Folk tale): "Bowaon at Totoon"

Bowaon at Totoon—Falsehood and Truth—is a folktale from Samar and Leyte. Spanning between the two islands in the eastern Visayas is the San Juanico Bridge, the longest (over-water) bridge in the Philippines. It is 2.16 kilometers or 1.34 miles (7,200 feet) long and a height of 41 meters or 131 feet. It crosses the scenic San Juanico strait between Samar and Leyte.

Bowaon and Totoon

Once upon a time, there were two friends, Bowaon and Totoon. They couldn't find work so they decided to go away from their place to look for their fortune somewhere. They brought with them some rice and then they mounted their horses. As

they went on, they got hungry. From a distance, they saw a coral reef. They got off their horses and headed for the reef to catch some fish. They caught schools of fish but these were very tiny. Totoon forgot his hunger. He returned the fish he caught to the reef. Bowaon got angry. "How will we be able to eat?" he scolded Totoon. "Never mind Bowaon, they are so tiny; they will still grow bigger," Totoon replied.

They rode on their horses again. After a distance, they saw a dead man. Totoon asked Bowaon to stop so they could bury the body. But Bowaon got angry, "Are you out of mind? If somebody sees us, he'll think we killed him." "But we should show mercy. There is a way of finding the truth. Well, if you won't help me, then I will bury him by myself. You may go onward if you please. I'll follow later," said Totoon.

Bowaon went ahead while Totoon dug a grave for the body. Then he carried the dead person and buried him. He prayed over it then went on his journey. Bowaon could not bear to leave him so he returned for Totoon. They therefore, set out together again. Trotting along, they heard babies crying. They went towards the direction of the sounds. They found hungry baby eagles in a nest.

"Let's stop for a while and feed the eagles," suggested Totoon. Then Bowaon saw that Totoon was going to kill his horse. "Are you foolish? When they grow up they'll prey on you. Let's go on, we're already delayed," Bowaon said. "Don't mind me. I pity these baby eagles. Anyway, no debt goes unpaid. Go ahead, I'll just follow."

"If you go on with your silly ideas, I'll not give you a ride," threatened Bowaon.

"Then I'll walk," decided Totoon. "Even if I go slowly, I'll still reach my destination."

After killing his horse, he fed the eagles. When they feel asleep, Totoon left. Bowaon again returned to give Totoon a ride. Far ahead, they sighted a palace. "Let's go," suggested Bowaon. "Let's ask the king for work."

They knocked at the palace door. They were told to enter, but since it was late, they were not granted any audience with the king. They slept in the palace. "You see," taunted Bowaon, "if you did not delay our trip, we should've been able to eat. You are the cause of all this." They went to sleep nevertheless since they were so tired from their journey.

After a while, Totoon heard someone calling his name. "Rise, Totoon, and listen: In the morning, when the king calls you for breakfast, don't eat at once. On the table you'll see a pen and some cooking utensils. Sit near the pen, and your future will be bright. Don't be surprised. I am the dead person whom you have buried. I have come back to pay you back the favor you showed me." Everything went silent and Totoon fell asleep again.

In the morning, the two friends were called for breakfast by the king. As he was told the night before, he saw the pen and some cooking utensils on the table. Bowaon sat down and just as soon began eating.

"You, Totoon, will become my secretary; while you, Bowaon, will become my cook," announced the king.

At first, Bowaon was glad with his work for it meant plenty of food. He would not go hungry. But as time went on, he began to envy Totoon for the latter was not fatigued much. He thought of smearing the name of his friend.

One day, Bowaon went to the king to report that he heard Totoon say that the latter would be able to find the ring the king lost within three days and that the reward will be marriage to the princess. Of course, the king got angry for he did not say anything like that. He had Totoon summoned to his hall. Totoon protested the accusation but the angry king would not listen to him.

“Go, look for the ring then and if you find it you will have the princess for a reward but, if you fail you will lose your head,” announced the king.

Totoon did not say anything. He got a paddle and rode far out to the sea. There, he cried because of his fate. No longer after, he heard a voice. It was a fish asking him why he was crying. Totoon unburdened his problem. After listening, the fish dived deep into the sea. When it surfaced, many fishes came up with it, each one with a ring in its snout. Totoon looked among the rings. The king’s ring was not there. The fishes dived again. When they came up, they were bringing the king’s ring. Totoon thanked the fish.

Don’t mention it,” said the fish. Actually we are only paying the favor you showed us before when you threw us back into the reef.” Then they left.

The king rejoiced that the ring had been found. He held a banquet. Now, Bowaon had plenty of work again. He did not like it. In the banquet, the king announced the forthcoming marriage of Totoon and the princess. Bowaon was very angry. There would be much work ahead. He thought of a plan to thwart the wedding. But it did not succeed.

After the wedding, Bowaon went to the king. “Your majesty,” he said. “I heard Totoon say that on the third day, the princess will give birth.”

The king got mad. He once more summoned Totoon. “Do you mean to say that you had an affair with the princess even before you got married? You scoundrel! But since you’re already my child, I can’t do anything. However, do what you’ve said---that the princess will give birth three days from now. If not, you’ll surely lose your head.”

Totoon cried in despair. The princess comforted him by saying she’d talk with her father, but he couldn’t be calmed. After a while, an eagle came. “Don’t cry, Totoon,” she began. “This time I’ll help you in payment for help you extended my children. Get a midwife and talk to her. I’ll bring you a newly-born child.” Then the eagle flew away.

When she came back, she had an infant, still dripping with blood. In the bedroom, the midwife acted as if there really was a delivery. When the king awoke he heard the ones of an infant. He was amazed that the princess did give birth. He forgot his anger. “It must be a miracle,” he muttered.



EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

For further reading please refer to the link provided:

Region VII: Central Visayas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VljN75Pz1Bo>

Sicalac and Sicavay

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guxiyW5XKnU>

Sail East: Adventures in Eastern Visayas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ1tTkIEzo>

Tale of Bowaon and Totoon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTYLJcXB3E8>

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- <http://instructionalminutes.blogspot.com/2013/12/bowaon-and-totoon-falsehood-and-truth.html>