

SHORT PAPERS ON PHILIPPINE FOLK  
LORE AND LIFE\*

THE WEIRD TALE OF THE TWELVE HUNCHBACKS.  
A TAGALOG FOLKTALE

By Toribio de Castro

The practice of the *pangangaluluwa* is traditional on All Soul's Day among the people of the Tagalog provinces. It takes its name from the Tagalog word *kaluluwa*, meaning soul. A group of from four to eight persons, supposed to be the souls of the dead, go from house to house, from early evening until dawn, singing and asking for alms. There is first an introductory ringing of their little bell, followed by a "*Magandang gabi, po,*" or "Good evening." The inhabitant of the house knows his obligation well, opens his window or door, and gives these "wandering souls" a five- or ten-centavo piece. The money collected is divided among the members of the group after the payments for the candles and morning mass the next day have been made.

It is a common belief that the souls of those who commit venial sins are not readily admitted to Purgatory, and are forced to wander about begging for alms to buy candles to be used in praying for the relief of their sins. That is why when people awake the morning after All Souls' Day and find their chickens, papayas, or squashes missing, they blame the hungry wandering souls and simply grumble. Sometimes even their bamboo ladders are gone and found later across the street with other ladders, benches, and chairs artistically arranged in the form of a tomb. On this tomb are still to be found the remains of candles and about it the feathers and bones of the lost chickens.

How these pranks are played is very simple. While the singing is going on, two or three persons catch the chickens, grabbing them by the throat to check any *iyok* of distress they may make. If these birds are not available they take papayas, squashes, or bananas, and if these are not to be found, the ladders and wooden shoes carelessly left about become booty.

The songs are usually sung to the accompaniment of a guitar or violin and relate to humorous as well as religious and sentimental matters. After the group has sung of the hardships of the Virgin Mary, it moves on to an-

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\* See Editor's Note on p. 271.

other house and sings about tragic episodes of the Revolution. At the next house, the song may be about *Ang Labing-dalawang Kuba* or The Twelve Hunchbacks.

*Ang Labing-dalawang Kuba* is a grotesque tale, a favorite with the Tagalogs, about twelve brothers who were all hunchbacks. The oldest was very rich and was the only married one. He was a fisherman by occupation and was often absent from home. This oldest hunchback was selfish and stingy and very bad tempered, as his poor wife had reason to know.

The other eleven hunchbacks were beggars who went around from morning till night asking for alms.

One day, these eleven hunchbacks went to their rich brother's house but found him absent from home. Their sister-in-law, pitying them, prepared a good dinner for them all, but warned them beforehand to hide at once if their *kaká*, or oldest brother, came, lest she be flogged for entertaining them.

As the eleven brothers were eating they caught sight of their *kaká* coming up to the house and hid themselves in a *kaban* or large trunk, which their sister-in-law then locked.

The oldest hunchback did not leave the house that whole afternoon and also the next day, but did not learn about his hidden brothers. When he finally went away, his wife opened the trunk and found the eleven brothers all dead! She was frantic as to how to dispose of the eleven crooked corpses.

Fortunately, a loser at cards came along the street.

"*Mama!!! mama!* (mister) . . ." called the woman.

The man asked the woman what she wanted. She explained that she had a corpse which she wanted him to bury and that she would pay him a peso for this service. The man agreed to the proposal at once, thinking this would be an easy way to earn a peso.

The woman gave him the corpse of one of the hunchbacks, and told him to bury it deeply, else it would surely return. The man did not pay any attention to this warning and buried the crooked figure rather carelessly.

After his work, he returned to the woman to get his pay. To his surprise he found the corpse of another hunchback in the house which he thought was the one he had buried.

"See! . . . it came back!" the woman explained. "Bury it deeply, I say!"

The man, confused, took up the corpse and buried it. He returned hurriedly to the woman eager to get his peso. But again he found what he thought was the same corpse on the floor of the house, but which was really the third of the eleven dead brothers. Without a word, he carried a corpse down once more and buried it deeper than he had done the others.

On his return, the woman complained of his dishonesty for not heeding her warnings, for there on the floor again lay a dead hunchback.

“I told you to bury it deeper!” she said.

Again, the poor man went away with a corpse in his arms. After burying it he stayed in the graveyard for a while, and then, convinced that the corpse could not get out of such a deep grave, directed his steps toward the woman’s house, wiping the perspiration off his face and arms as he walked.

To his annoyance, he again found the body of a dead person no different from the one he had just buried, which was in fact only the sixth of the eleven corpses. Without a word, the man grabbed the corpse by the neck and dragged it to the burial place. On his return he again saw the corpse of a hunchback and so he carried it away, and so on until he had buried ten of the dead brothers.

Returning to the house for the eleventh time, the man saw once more a corpse and, still silent, took it away to the graveyard. After digging a hole about two feet deep, he cut through the neck of the corpse, separating the head from the body, and buried them separately. To make still more sure of his work, he placed large and heavy stones on the mound of earth covering the grave. He remained at the place for nearly an hour, with the shovel in his hand ready to pound down the body of the hunchback should it again appear. After feeling sure that it could not make any further mischief, he started for the woman’s house.

However, he frequently looked back to see if the dead body had again risen from the grave. At first he saw nothing, but then he became aware of a hunchback walking only a few feet in front of him. Thinking that this was the corpse he had just buried,—in reality it was the husband of the woman he was working for,—he ran after him and pulled him back to the graveyard. The hunchback protested and demanded an explanation, but the man, inflamed with wrath at such an attitude he thought a pretense to fool him once more, knocked him down with his shovel.

“You wish to fool me again! . . . You won’t escape me this time!” He did not leave off beating the wretched humpback until he was dead. Then he buried the body,—the last of the twelve hunchbacks.

(Reprinted from *Philippine Magazine*, Vol. XXXI, November, 1934, No. 11)