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**“Ang kuwento ng araw at buwan” (“The Story of the Sun and Moon”):
What it Means to be Filipino-American.**

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Advised by Professor Dan Venning

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ID Visual Arts and Theater
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Traditional Filipino folklore is disappearing among the younger generations. In Fr. Joseph Baumgartner's article "Folklore: The Forgotten Mirror of Philippine Culture," he insists that in order to preserve Philippine folklore, Filipinos must follow Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:

We must do what Goethe, speaking through the mouth of Faust, advised his countrymen to do: "All that you have bequeathed you by your fathers, earn it in order to possess it. (Baumgartner 5)

Baumgartner argues that it is not enough to collect the folklore of the past and present and put them into books to keep the tradition alive. There must be more done through sharing and performing these traditions in order to remember this mirror of Philippine culture.

I am among the first generation of Filipino Americans who do not have a strong connection nor memory of Filipino folklore. My skin may be the golden brown of my ancestors, but my thoughts and learnings of Philippine culture have been threaded from a Western perspective and can be the reason why I sometimes feel disconnected to my heritage. This disconnect to my heritage makes me question what it means to Filipino American and if I am Filipino enough for both the Filipino and Filipino American communities. I am frequently tossed into an identity crisis but I am not alone as Baumgartner states:

The identity crisis, which affects many educated Filipinos, is in fact a worldwide phenomenon, perhaps most pronounced among the young in western and westernized countries, but by no means confined to them. (Baumgartner 5)

Baumgartner is defining the phenomenon of this identity crisis as a feeling of deprivation of "Asianess" and loss between two worlds, the East and the West. This can be particularly problematic as the Philippines, according to Nick Joaquin, are not related to mainland Asia. In Joaquin's article, "Lapu-Lapu and Humabon: The Filipino Twins" he believes that the Filipinos

are more a part of Western culture than of Asian culture. He uses the example of *pancit*, a popular Filipino noodle dish, to relay that the Philippines were influenced more by the Spanish than China or India. He explains:

Only under Spain did we learn to eat it and, therefore, even so Asian an artifact as *pancit* must be considered part of our Westernized colonial culture, along with corn, cabbage, calabaza, and camote. Our prehispanic ignorance of *pancit* is just on the many indications that not in cuisine, nor in religion, nor in art, nor in technology, not in history, nor even in geography, did we belong to the world of Asia. (Joaquin 53)

Joaquin does mention that there were Chinese and Indian traders that passed through the island; however, they only left some of their porcelain and some of their dialect that did not really affect the whole Philippine islands. If the nation is not Asian, like Joaquin says it is not, do the Western colonial influences make the Philippines a part of the Western world? I believe geographically it does not, but the Western elements the Spanish and Americans left behind in the Philippines have combined with the early Philippine folklore to create the country's present folklore. Baumgartner refers to this combination as "Filipinized" which results in "the blend of East and West, far from being an unpalatable hodgepodge, strikes most visitors as both unique and thoroughly charming" (Baumgartner 4).

As a Filipina American who, for almost four years, has lived in a college environment less diverse than in my home state of California, I have pushed to learn about my culture and its traditions through art about Philippine folklore. For myself, this folklore creates a connection between my wandering identity and my homeland that I have only seen in pictures. Learning the folktales and myths keep my cultural roots growing in a place I feel sometimes disconnected to

and is the reason why I chose to create a short animated film alongside a performance on the Philippine folktale, “Ang kuwento ng araw at buwan” translating to “The Story of the Sun and Moon.” This creative journey has taken me through many highs and lows: from the technical animation processes to artistic roadblocks and frustrations. The anticipated outcome is to be able to engage with the Union College community with my short film and performance, to showcase what it means for myself to be Filipina American.

Before beginning this project I knew that I was going to make an animation around a Filipino folktale. This inspiration not only came from the small diversity around me on campus but the recent push in the last decade of animation in which studios are releasing more culturally diverse background shorts and feature films. For example, Pixar’s short *Float* features its first two Filipino American leads, in which the Filipino American father, Alex, discovers that his son can float which makes him unique from other kids. In fear of his son being judged by others, he hides his son from the world. But when his son’s ability escapes to the public, Alex must decide to embrace his son’s ability or run from it. Although written and directed by Filipino American Bobby Rubio, the short was originally written with white American characters because he was not sure if anyone would want to see Filipino Americans in an animation. In an interview with Rubio, we find out that what changed his mind was a co-worker who came up to him and said “This is a story about you and your son. How's your son going to feel when he looks up at the screen and that character’s white?” (Tangcay) From that statement Rubio did not want his son to think he was unworthy, so he changed it to keep it culturally connected to them both. Other recent cultural animation films include Pixar's *Coco* and *Luca*, Disney’s *Raya and the Last Dragon* and *Moana*, Netflix’s *Over the Moon*, and much more. These films push to educate a wide audience about the different cultures in the world with fun imaginative twists and turns.

While the films I mentioned above are directed towards a younger audience, the messages in the films are universal to all ages. Adults were once kids too, and tellings of a fable or myth can remind them of a time when they were a child listening to bedtime stories from their parents and grandparents. Bedtime stories to myths and legends vary from place to place. Some may have the same messages but the characters and creatures are different because they are based on the location they are from and sometimes the religion that is there. Stories of old myths, legends, and cultural tales need to be shared and no one story or person is ever like the other, even if they come from the same country or city. The more stories that are shared with others, the more chances we get to keep cultural history and roots alive. Therefore when choosing my cultural story, I tried to pick a tale that represented my ancestral history and have it be barely touched by the West. The book *Philippine Myths, Legends, and Folktales* by Maximo Ramos is where I chose to source my folktale from because of his statement in the beginning of his collection,

Represented here are the ethnic groups of the plains and coastal areas, of the foothills and mountains, of the swamps and rainforests. They were originally told in Bikol, Bontok, Ifuago, Iloko, Kalinga, Maranao, Pampango, Tagalog, Tausug, Tinguian, Visayan, and other Philippine vernaculars. An attempt was made to exclude from this collection any material that showed borrowings from the West. But the attempt may not have fully succeeded, for in matters of folklore one cannot always tell what is Western and what is Eastern. (Ramos)

His statement reminds me of how hard it is to have Philippine stories without colonial influences. Though it is not impossible to find a folktale intact with its originality pre-Spanish colonization, it is still extremely difficult.

At first, I was going to choose multiple stories from Ramo's book to perform, but in a realistic timeline of an animated short film, I chose to only do one, "Ang Kuwento ng araw at

buwan” or in Ramo’s book “Why the Sun is Brighter than the moon.” (Ramos 6) “The Story of the Sun and Moon” resonated with me because I had once heard a similar tale in grade school, but through Greek mythology. Why are the tales I learn in elementary or high school in the U.S. about the Romans or Greeks? Why was the only time I felt included in U.S. history books was in a small paragraph mentioning the Filipino Guerillas in World War II or during the immigration of Asian laborers to America? To read about “The Story of the Sun and the Moon,” from a Philippine perspective, was eye-opening in the sense that there are more Filipino folktales just like it. With a chosen story in hand, the creative labor began. To help me navigate the physical art making of this project, Professor Orellana advised me through the Visual Arts portion in the Fall and Winter Term.

At the start of fall term, I had to deep dive into Adobe After Effects and learn how to set up character rigging. In the span of the first six weeks of fall term, I had found the software Duik Bassel that would do most of all the rigging work for me on After Effects. The creators, RxLaboratory, state that “Duik is a comprehensive animation and rigging set tool for Adobe After Effects. It provides the main rigging tools, found in any 3D software, like IK, controllers, and bones, but adapts them to 2D animation in After Effects” (Duduf, and Kevin Masson). I watched multiple tutorial videos on YouTube about creating a simple rig with the Duik Bassel tool. When I became more comfortable with the information, I did a test run with one of my past creatures, and created an okay beginners attempt for a walk cycle. Once I felt more comfortable with using the Duik Bassel tool, it was time to dive deeper into the folktale I chose.

To have a fruitful animated short movie that I could visualize, I started with the bare bones of drawing multiple storyboard sketches. Professor Orellana and I discussed that by the end of Fall Term I should create a rough animatic to actually see my storyboard in action. An

animatic is “a preliminary sequence of shots, images, or sketches that is filmed or arranged usually with a sound track and viewed to determine its effectiveness before being finalized” (Merriam-Webster). Once I was satisfied with all my sketches, I took pictures of all of them and put them together as an animatic. However, my preliminary movie did not have narration as a soundtrack, only a music score because I narrated besides my rough draft movie when presenting it to Professor Orellana.

After Fall Term, I went home for winter break and the work for this project continued. Since I did not have a good enough computer at home to start animating my film, I decided to design my main characters on Adobe Illustrator and make my costume for the performance. When designing my characters Mayari and Apolaki, I researched what was known about the two fictional siblings. Their costume color choices reflected on what I feel embodied the symbols they represent. Red and with mostly yellow and white accents for Apolaki, the Sun, because I see him as a fiery ball of warmth and strong rage. Light blue with yellow and white accents for Mayari, the Moon, because she is the calmness of cool light that glistens in the dark night. From sketches on ProCreate to becoming shapes on Adobe Illustrator, their designs had changes throughout the whole project. The most noticeable change was with Mayari’s skirt that changed to shorts, because I was having a hard time rigging the movement of her skirt, and knew I did not have enough time to learn the mechanics of moving cloth with the Duik Tool. Other than their digital apparel, I worked with my grandmother Helenita Barcelona to create the skirt for my performance. My grandmother, Helen, was a seamstress in the Philippines, and she immigrated to the U.S. with her children in 1974. I think this was a vital process to work with her on part of the costume because I got to learn a few tricks about sewing with her and most importantly enjoyed spending time with her. The skirt we made together is an imitation of the long ankle-

length volumized skirts Filipina women wore during the Spanish colonial period called *saya*, which literally means skirt. For once every week, for six weeks, I would go over to my grandmother's house and help make my *saya*. The *saya* will be paired with the Philippine's national dress attire collared shirt originally designed for males, the *barong*. The *barong* is usually made out of pina, but the one I have is made out of silk. Both pieces are the only apparel of my costume, as when I perform, I will be barefoot.

When winter term began, that's when the animation slowly made its way alive in After Effects. There was a setback on coming back to school because of Covid protocols pushing Union's start date on campus back, and I also tested positive for Covid. Once I got back on campus, I worked day and night to have 60% of my animated video completed. The hardest and most time consuming part of the animation process was the fight scene between the siblings. I was using the Duik tool to control each of the characters' movements. I was happy with the results because even though the fight is not as smooth as a professional's, I am overall proud of myself in becoming better with the Duik tool each day. In the middle of spring term, the animation was finally finished, I felt a sense of relief knowing I had accomplished a difficult challenge on my own, and now all I had to do was make small changes to make the animation cleaner. I made small adjustments to certain scenes and then I exported my short from Adobe After Effects and installed the movie file into an SD card. Now all that was left was setting up my space and projector, a final dress rehearsal, and then showtime.

On May 20, 2022 I performed my piece in front of a live audience in the intimate East Gallery space of Feigenbaum Center for the Visual Arts. Thirty minutes before the reception and an hour before my performance, I along with other senior artists were doing last minute finishes towards our installations. I made sure sound, lighting, recording setup, and my projector were

functioning properly so nothing would go wrong during the performance. There was a mishap during my audio check as my bluetooth transmitter for the projector and speaker was dead. The only other option for sound was to use the projector's built-in speaker and fortunately the sound was loud enough to fill the east side of the gallery. After all my technological equipment checks were done, I spent the next 15 minutes changing into my costume and doing my hair and makeup. I could feel a rush of excitement and nervousness as I looked at myself in the mirror wearing a traditional *piña barong* and satin *saya*. For the first time at Union College I felt complete because I found the missing puzzle pieces to my college experience, and in the mirror I knew who I was. Two minutes before the performance I walked to my spot by my projected screen. The loud commotion of the people in the gallery started to move towards my direction. Friends, colleagues, professors, and strangers found themselves seated on the floor with pillows I made for this occasion or were standing because they were unaware what was about to begin or because the front row was taken up by my excited friends. One minute before the performance my advisor Dr. Venning gave a small introduction about me to both the listening and talkative audience. The audience clapped at the end of the introduction and then they became silent as I spoke the first words of my story. For five minutes the room was only filled with the sound of my voice and hum of audio from the projector's speaker. When performing I noticed how people's eyes were captivated in a trance that went back and forth between me and the animation. I also saw a few nods as people were understanding the folklore and all I wanted to do was smile. The five minutes of my performance felt like a minute as it flowed through my body and voice naturally. At the end when I gave my thanks, the room roared with applause that echoed through the gallery into my ears with a sense of accomplishment. Comments I remembered were "You should share the recording of your piece to someone, they will

appreciate it.” or “That was amazing, you are trailblazing as no one has ever done a performance with their art work before”. I had done what I had set out to do my fall term and gained a newfound appreciation for sharing my culture to a wider audience.

In conclusion, I have learned that I am not more American nor more Filipino, I am equally both of my ethnicities as I am proud to be Filipina American. The fact that I live in the United States and have not been to my other homeland does not make me less Filipino, it means I have a hodgepodge identity. This hodgepodge of a cultural background is the foundation to my identity that embodies the DNA of Filipino culture: from the indigenous deity beliefs to the implementation of Christian civilization of the West and more. Furthermore this experience pushes me to continue creating art around Filipino folklore because the stories and culture of the Philippine people should be shared and known to a worldwide audience.



1.

Filipino Creatures. (Left to Right) Tianak, Aman Sinaya, Manananggal, Tikbalang, Amihan, and Duwende.

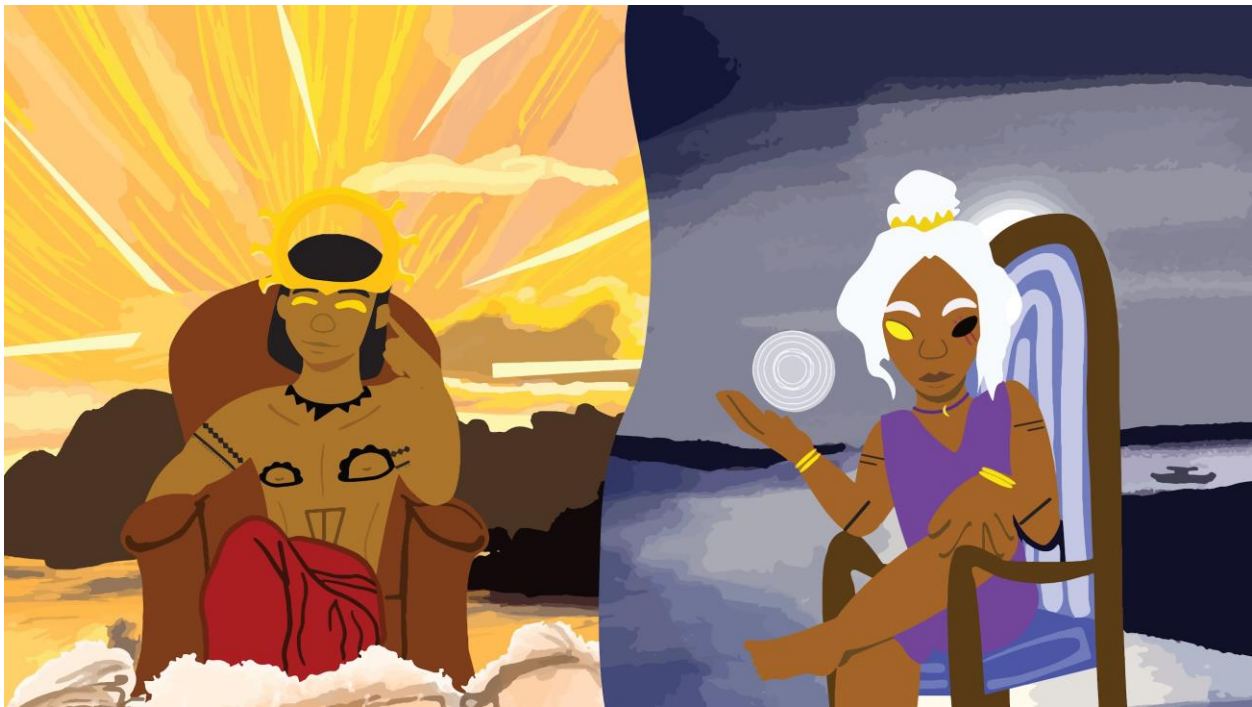


2. Storyboard Draft of "Ang Kuwento ng Araw at Buwan"



3.

Youtube video of live performance [Rochelle-Leah Barcelona Nuqui's Senior Thesis Performance | May 20, 2022](#)



5. Narrated Video of "Ang Kuwento ng Araw at Buwan" ["Ang Kuwento ng Araw at Buwan" \("The Story of the Sun and Moon"\) -Animated Short - Senior Thesis '22](#)



6. Picture of my grandma Helenita helping me sew my *saya*.

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