

Kudaman: An Oral Epic in the Palawan Highlands

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I. Ethnographic approach

The Palawan people live in the southern half of the island of the same name between the Sulu Sea and the South China Sea. For the past 23 years, we have been working with them, doing anthropological and linguistic research. In spite of the presence of an ancient syllabic script, still in use today in certain valleys, the context is one of oral tradition, for the script has never been used to fix oral literature or knowledge. It is used to convey messages.

We have focused our attention on language and all the referents in the world, the collection and observation of natural objects and phenomena, and the taxonomies that the highlanders have elaborated in order to master, through their language, the complexity of the world that surrounds them and in which they have to survive. This has been done *in situ* through the study of nomenclatures, all the spontaneous acts of speech, all the forms of stylized discourse, the genres of their oral literature and customary law, their techniques, and *savoir-faire*. Hence the book *Flowers of Speech, Palawan Natural History* (Revel 1990-92) and its general title, which designates, of course, the flowers in nature but also the figures of speech, according to their rhetorics.

First Encounter

By the end of the first week of May 1970 in Tabud, we were invited to two weddings in the hamlet of Năgdaridiq. As soon as the sun had disappeared behind the mountain, the guests of Tabud started to walk upstream. They followed the waterfall, the Măkăgwaq River. What was for them a little stroll full of joy was for me the discovery of the weakness and awkwardness of my body. After walking for an hour, we deviated from the right bank of the forest to climb the embankment. Then we heard

for the first time the music of gongs whose dull amplitude seemed to emanate from the canopy of the trees and blossomed in a pink sky revealed by a vast sloping swidden.

The weddings—that is to say the jural discussion, *bisara*, and the brief ritual, *bulun*, which seals the social contract—would be celebrated the following day. On this sleepless eve, the guests, all relatives, were present, gathered under the roof of the large meeting house, *käläng bänwa*, in order to enjoy the feast, without a jar of rice wine or food, as is proper for a marriage jural discussion.

The men took turns playing gongs, *basal*, passing from one instrument to another, inviting each other by offering the mallets; the women, shaking little brooms of folded leaves, *silad*, were dancing. Beating the bamboo floor with their feet, they made a new percussion that had to fit perfectly with the gong orchestra and more particularly with the *sanang*, the small ringed gong with boss. If not, the whole orchestra would stop. And suddenly, the gongs became silent and from a dark corner of the house rose the chant of a man who was lying down, his left arm folded over his eyes, his right hand maintaining a fine piece of cloth over his chest. The man was Usuy, the shaman and most famous bard of that valley. He was chanting *Kudaman*, the Datuq of the Plain, whose abode is fringed by the rays of the sun. And thus for the first time we attempted to tape this chant. It lasted until sunrise; one does not sing during daylight. Shortly after, we were supposed to go back to Manila, but with the agreement that Usuy would chant for us in November.

With the semester break in October, we were back near our host, Jose Rilla, and settled in a small bamboo hut almost entirely bounded with rattan, located in the coconut grove not too far from a creek. Late in the evening of November 5th, I was surprised to hear Galnuq's voice; Mälä was accompanying him. They were coming from upstream with Usuy. I thought I should prepare some food to eat, but I was told that Usuy wanted to chant *Kudaman* for an acoustic recording and that he was going to start immediately and continue until dawn. Everyone converged on our small house, including mothers with their babies at their breasts. It was midnight when Usuy started, with an admirable vocal technique that molded his chant in a constant flow, with a serene tonality that was extremely beautiful and peaceful; he only stopped after sunrise, at six-thirty in the morning.

Since then, I have often heard Usuy chanting. In Bungsud, he used to come under the roof of the *käläng bänwa* of Lambung to let us hear and tape the integrality of the six nights of *Kudaman* and the two nights of *Ajäk*, but I never happened to hear him sing out of a spontaneous impulse of the daily events of his life or of the major events of his hamlet, for I

never lived near him. However, I did listen to and tape many other epics in different cultural areas and during different ceremonial contexts, as the list below shows. These epics were chanted on the occasion of a successful wild boar hunt as a counter-gift to the Master of Prey, to welcome a guest, or for entertainment.

Epics as frescoes of Palawan life and world view

The long chanted stories of the highlanders are frescoes of mores, tableaux of nature and of institutional life, testimonies to a cosmogony, an ethic, a lifestyle, a world view proper to the highland culture. The cultural content of the numerous epics that over the years I have heard, taped, transcribed, translated, and summarized allows me to distinguish several recurrent topics:

nature and landscapes (sea, rivers, streams, mountains, forest, shore, islands, trees and vegetation, animal lore)

playful activities: hunting with the blowgun, buying clothes, traveling far away, rice wine drinking ceremony, and gong music

values and social practices: the rules of marriage, the custom of respect and obedience to the in-laws, the rule of residence, the custom of sharing food, of helping each other in collective tasks

invisible beings (Good Doers/Evil Doers), the relationship to the superior deities and to all the beings

the beautiful in physical features and shapes, ornaments, soundscape and music

But there is one dimension that I would particularly like to touch upon: the relationships that unite the epics to shamanism and to mythology. In the highlands, we observed that all the shamans are also bards but that the reverse is not true; not all bards are shamans. In addition, there is a close, performance-based linkage between the act of chanting the epics, *tultul*, and that of chanting the shamanic voyage, *ulit*.

The shaman sings the difficult experience of the voyage of his double, *kuruduwa*, by a specific chant, the *lumbaga*, whose melody is in all points assimilable to any epic melodic line. And it is precisely the ordeals that the soul of the shaman overcomes in the course of his voyage—the encounters with the Evil Doers, *Länggam* or *Säqitan*, the discussions, the bargaining engaged in with the Invisible Beings—that constitute the shamanic chant. Moreover, to sing *tultul* is to be possessed by a *Täw Tultultulän*. These “Epic Heroes” are a type of humanity who live in the

median space and intercede between people on this earth and Ämpuq. They are a Benevolent Humanity protecting the “Real Men.” The act of chanting thus doubles with the embodiment, in the very person of the bard, of these heroic and semi-divine Beings. One can interpret this relationship as an act of possession in which the bard becomes a medium.

Epics are always chanted at night, ending at daybreak; it is forbidden to sing when the sun shines and during the day. This prohibition links the epic to the night and a sacred world. Moreover, one would never chant for amusement in a light joking manner.

The melodic similarity between *tultul* and *lumbaga*, their nocturnal performance (marked with gravity), and the conjunction in one person of the two aptitudes and the two social functions are among the features associating the epic and the shamanic chant. Another parallel feature would be the companion of the shaman, the *gimbar*, and the accompanist of the bard, the *bäbaräk*-player. In a seance of *ulit*, for instance, this acolyte follows the double of the shaman up to the jar of the Master of Rice, Ämpuq ät Paräj, and through his own body-trance manifests the state of drunkenness of the shaman’s very soul. In the same manner, the accompanist with a small ring flute follows the voice of the bard. According to my observation, the companion of the shaman’s double or of the bard’s voice was always one and the same person—Kälulut, the acolyte of Usuy—and this association does not seem to be mere chance.

Finally, the experience of acquiring clairvoyant power and creative power are closely related, as we shall see. In addition, in the Bagobo language, in Mindanao, the term *ulit* actually means “epic.” This permutation of meaning of the same lexical item between the two languages, Bagobo and Palawan, is certainly very revealing of the conceptual ambivalence of *ulit* and *tultul*, which is conveyed by the very person of the bard-shaman and his practice in this society of the Sulu Sea cultural area, as has also been observed in other Southern Philippine societies.

In the highlands, where the art of the epic reaches its peak and where mythological memories are abundant, it seems at first that the mythical elements referred to in these long chanted narratives are rather few. The content of the *tultul* is in no way the content of myth, and these narratives are far from etiological accounts. However, mythical references are not totally absent: the *tultul* refers to natural celestial, atmospheric, cosmogonic, visible, and invisible events and manifests these events in an indirect or rather allusive manner.

An analysis of *Kudaman* will illustrate our point. All the *Linamin* are tutelary deities of different elements in nature: trees, birds, natural phenomena, and cosmogonic phenomena. Now, in *Kudaman* one witnesses the invasion—classic and universal in the epics—of the Ilanän. They come in multitudes from the “Threshold of the World” and their attire is of stone. This invasion comprises a double homology, between the Ilanän and the aggressive beasts created by the Being who sustains the world on the one hand, and between the Ilanän dressed in stone on the other. One can proceed to a double reading of this excerpt of the epic: on the mythical plane, the Ilanän are the reiteration, the reincarnation, of the destructive powers who in the earliest times annihilated the Humanity of the Real Men. From the historical point of view, the Ilanän are pirates, the traditional enemies of the Palawan, and they come from the end of the world, namely the Sulu Sea and the China Sea (the “Confines of the World”), from Mindanao and the north of Borneo to raid these populations.

The lesson to be drawn from these epics is twofold. The presence of the forces of harmony and chaos, their clash, and the final restoration of a peaceful, harmonious social life are a constant feature of the epics that I have heard. One can perceive from a study of their epics a mythological as well as a historical authenticity specific to the culture of the Palawan, a double identity would explain the emotional resonance of these long chanted narratives.

Singers of tales: a chain of transmission

Usuy's memory

When we met, Usuy had learned this epic from Buntäli, his nephew (cf. kinship chart below), who had come to spend some time at Mängkupaq about fifteen years before. Buntäli chanted for seven consecutive nights in his uncle's house. After his departure, Usuy practiced by himself, repeating the melodic motifs of each character. He sang during the night but also while working alone in his field, “repeating” these melodies and narrations. Then one day he was confident enough that he had mastered the different musical motifs and the story he had memorized to go and sing at Carmen and Salatan's house. She was a very dear friend, and Salatan was then the *pänglimaq* of Bungsud. Carmen shed tears of great emotion upon listening to Usuy's voice and to the story.

Buntäli's memory

According to Buntäli, the story of *Kudaman* was chanted by a man whom Inya (or Kunyas) did not herself meet but learned that he was called “Kagayan” (from Cagayan de Sulu Island). In fact, this generic term applies to all the Jama Mapun people of the area. She herself had married a Kagayan and specified to Buntäli: “This *tultul* must not be sung for fun. If you have engraved it in your memory, sing it well up through the end. If not, your stomach will become swollen, *mäbusung ka* (lack of respect).”

But Buntäli only knew two musical motifs and revealed to me in 1990 that Usuy expanded them to as many motifs as characters. This discrepancy reveals that creativity is part of the chanting of epics; as Albert Lord observed (1960:ch. 5), the same epic differs in the repertoire of different singers and also in various performances by the same singer. The singer of tales is a poet who composes in the course of oral performance.

One is then able to trace the lineage of an epic by mapping the chain of bards as follows, and in parallel fashion to establish the chain of regions in which an epic has been sung (> = transmitted to):

Si Nisa	>	Si Kunyas	>	Si Buntäli	>	Si Usuy
<i>Mati (ulu ät Tigaplan)</i>		<i>Kapäk (ulu ät Mangkungän)</i>		<i>Mangkungän</i>		<i>Mangkupaq</i>
Highlands	→	Highlands	→	Foothills	→	Highlands

Kunyas' memory

Contrary to my first statement (cf. Revel 1983, Maranan and Revel-Macdonald 1991) and as a result of meeting Kunyas recently, I can now say that this epic apparently moved from the northeast toward the southwest, being sung among Palawan highlanders. It was not learned from the Pullun Mapun people on the coast, but from Kunyas' maternal aunt, Nisa, who had learned it from her own mother, Bungisa, and who came to stay in Kapäk for two months while Kunyas was still a young girl. After this period, she was married to a Kagayan and was taken to Uring-Uring, where she spent two and a half years of hardship as a young woman. Then she was able to return to her mother's household in the highlands; in fact, she experienced the life of an *uripän*.

According to Buntäli, this epic chant as well as magic (*batyaq*) and hunting charms (*pangtiq*) are part of the whole set of charms (*käpandayan*) that are taught by a Good-Doer through a dream (*taginäp*). He descends, lightly, onto a human and inspires him; listening is not sufficient in order to

memorize—one must be the recipient and receptacle of a gift (*bingäy*). While daytime listening is incompatible with memorization, dream listening cannot be forgotten. It is the role of memory in a dream and hence its multiplied capacity that is emphasized. Without the presence of a Good Doer close to the bard during this state of sleeping consciousness, the memorization of the chanted narrative would not be possible.

According to Usuy, this *tultul* is a *paläpläp*, a teaching to the “Real Men” by a *Taw ät Gäbäq*, a Being of the Forest, or *Taw Mänunga*, a Good Doer present on this earth from the time of its origin but now, according to the myth, no longer visible. Only shamans gifted with clairvoyance have the capacity to meet these beings during the shamanic voyage assimilated with a very peculiar sleep.

These beings have two opposite tendencies: one maleficent, the other beneficent, and the Greek notion of *daimôn* might more accurately express this ambivalence. In Palawan, *Säqitan* or *Länggam* are either *Taw Märaqat*, dangerous Evil Doers, the “Maleficents,” or *Taw Mänunga*, generous, protective givers of knowledge, or Good Doers. Thus the *Taw Märaqat* bring disease, suffering, and death, while the *Taw Mänunga* dispense knowledge, transmit the art of healing with medicinal plants and with all kinds of “charms,” *pantiq*, for hunting, fishing, and food-gathering, for the art of speaking, and love magic; for fighting, war, and child delivery; as well as the *tultul*, the epic songs, ultimate gifts to the Real Men by the Benevolent half of the Invisibles haunting this earth. And the favorite moment for the transmission of this extremely positive gift to mankind is precisely the *paläpläp*.

Thus for Usuy, the matter was very clear. The *tultul* was not originally borrowed from others, nor was it invented totally by a bard; it was rather “inspired” by a *Taw ät Gäbaq*, a Good Doer of the Forest. Here we deal with a principle explaining the act of creation that is based on a representation of the close link uniting the two types of humanity originally visible on earth, one of which disappeared from sight but remains eternally present and active, as much in the good as in the evil that it brings to the other.

The creativity in a *tultul* is understood as distinct from the composition of poetry, for example. In the latter case, man’s intelligence, *dängdäng*, or brain, *utäk*, is at work to compose poems ruled by fixed rhymes, a heptasyllabic meter, and a stanza made up of two distichs. Likewise, the art of the *tultul* is based not on an oneiric experience, but on a gift bestowed on the clear consciousness of the bard by a Good Doer of the forest for the happiness of Real Men.

Usuy

Usuy's father Puyang was a singer of tales in the Wäyg area, south of Tarusan. When he married Uding, he had to come and live with his in-laws, following the rule of *pinämikitan*, the rule of "adhering to your affine." Puyang chanted *Käbätangan*, which he had learned from his father, the hero bearing the name of the highest peak of Palawan, known to the Christians as Mont Mantalingayan. But he also sang *Taw ät Binalabag*, where one can see the Ilanän bringing violence and war and finally being annihilated by the hero.

As an adolescent, Usuy already knew and had memorized the repertoire of his father when he married Saliq and came to settle as a young son-in-law in Inubangan, close to Säramirig along the Mäkagwaq River, under the authority of Pänglimaḡ Bwat. Soon after, Usuy went to live in Mangkupaḡ, under the authority of Pangir, his elder brother-in-law. This hamlet is halfway between Bungsud and Kangrian. There he loved to hunt, laying traps for the wild pigs and chewing betel nuts. He was even known for the poor care of his field and used to lie down on a rainy day and sing for hours. In the surrounding hamlets lived other bards and shamans: Iliq in Tabingalan, Märadyaq Kälaḡ in Kangrian, as well as Lamang, a shaman who came from the beautiful Ilug valley on the South China Sea side of the island. He, more than anyone else, was the master of Usuy and transmitted to him a vocal technique and an aesthetics, namely a long breathing capacity and a voice finely ornamented with melisma. Lamang had in his repertoire *Linbuhanän*, *Bänbabang*, and *Datuḡ ät Palawan*, and transmitted them to Usuy, who also learned *Ajäk* (two nights) from Iliq his brother-in-law, *Puljäḡ* from Lamang and Märadyaq Kälaḡ his father-in-law by his second wife, *Käkulasyan* from Misläm his nephew from the Tämlang River region, *Sägäbäng* from Lumpat who lived in Kämantiyan and was his nephew, and *Kudaman* from Buntäliḡ, his junior (the son of his brother-in-law Pangir), who chanted for seven nights, as did Usuy for the recording in 1970-72.

Even with this most splendid repertoire, Usuy was not an accessible person, remaining very reclusive and secret. He had his passions and dedications and completely neglected everything that lay outside his interests. When he chanted an epic or the shamanic voyage, he was very calm, serious, and lost in concentration. He gave himself to these two major and demanding performances completely and with rare perseverance. His personality was reflected in his voice, his choice of vocal technique, and the aesthetic code of his narrative.

At a general level, it is interesting to note that the transmission of epics is linked to the residential rule of marriage, namely the necessity for males to leave their natal village and go to the place of their wives. This mobility of men has an influence on the mobility of long chanted narratives.

Buntäli

A man of more than fifty years of age in 1992, Buntäli is a highlander from the left bank of the Tämlang River who is settled now in the foothills on the right side of the Ämas River, near Brooke's Point. When he was a child, his family moved from Käsinuntingan to Mangkupaq, to Mäkuringsing, then back to Mangkupaq. As an adolescent following the rule of *pinämikitan*, he moved to Kapäk, the hamlet of his first wife, in the foothills on the right bank of the Mäkagwaq valley. This first marriage lasted six years: Buntäli was only fifteen and Käräng was a very young maiden of eleven who waited for three years before she came close to her husband. The marriage had been wished for by Pänglimağ Bwat, who interpreted the silence of the girl as acceptance. As Buntäli had no relationship with her, he spent the nights listening to *tultul* chanted by Kuyas, a Palawan woman bard who married a Kagayan. He tried to memorize these long chanted stories, and she taught him *Kudaman* and *Lambangan*. As a child, he listened to many long stories, *sudsugid*, narrated by his father night after night. He had listened to many epic chants as well, *tultul*, performed by Märdyağ Kälağ, his grandfather, who used to sing the whole night long.

As a young man, he experienced the ordeal of losing his wife: another man took her away from him. This adultery brought about a deep crisis, and he ran away to the forest and to other lands. In the forest of almaciga trees, he listened to a man of Däräpitan, Maryam by name, for when men went to collect resin, they used to sleep there in groups for several nights, and this was a time and a place of marvelous sounds, from the inspiring soundscape to the poetic experience of chanting an epic. Maryam sang the story of *Datuğ üt Pänarängsangan* for seven nights, and Buntäli memorized the melodic lines and the words.

Time passed. Buntäli, as a simple man, cultivated his field, watched the ripening of *ärisuräng* fruits, and went hunting for wild boars in the forest. At that time, he used to sleep in the forest, and in his dreams he saw a woman who, though not beautiful to look at, invited him to follow her, to listen and imitate her. And Buntäli memorized the words, the events, the

wars, the distinctive voices of each character: Ilanän, Bungkanak, Ampuq ät Däräs, Linamin ät Limukän, Sawkan Siklat, and the hero himself, Sunset Datuq. As noted earlier, this experience is called *päläpläp*, teaching through a dream, or rather a state between waking and sleeping, somewhat parallel to the state of the shaman making his voyage, where a creative inspiration, a gift from a Benevolent, a Taw Mänunga of the forest, falls like dew.

By that time, Usuy had chanted *Kudaman* in Mangkupa, where he was staying after having married Säli, the youngest sister of Buntäli's father. Usuy learned from Buntäli who had learned from Kunyas. The melodic line was single at the beginning, then developed into three with Buntäli, who contrasted the voices of Tuwan Putliq and of Linamin ät Utaaq. It was expanded to so many distinctive musical motifs by Usuy, exemplifying the creative process at work.

After some time, Buntäli thought about marrying again, and he chanted in Mangkungän, the place of Sita, the second woman he wanted to marry. He sang only after his proposal was accepted. His older brother decided to help him to put together the bride-price. Buntäli went upstream to the source of the Tigaplan River to gather more almaciga resin, and it was only after his return from the forest that his second wife Sita asked him to chant. Then they went to Käkadjasan on the coast near Uring-Uring to gather clams on the beach at low tide, and he chanted again, not *Kudaman*, but the *tultul* he had heard when he first went to the forest. According to him, the root of his interest in and mastery of epic singing is the sorrow he experienced as a young man.

II. Ethnolinguistic and ethnomusicological approach

The Palawan language is closely related to the Visayan languages of the Philippines and is part of the extensive Austronesian family. Characterized by a simple phonology—a 4-vowel system /i/u/a/ä/ and 16 consonants /p/b/t/d/k/g/h/q/m/n/ng/s/l/r/w/y/—it has no relevant stress. As might be expected, the morphology is more complex, but still simpler than in Tagalog. It also has a case grammar with focus.

Aural capture and transcription of the epic chant

Kudaman was recorded in the course of 1971-72 over seven non-consecutive nights. Usuy would come to Bungsud at twilight whenever

he felt inspired, and also perhaps when he wished to receive gifts (clothes, a little money, and sardines, a favorite). He also came to please me and to be faithful to his obligation to sing up through the end of the story, which his mentor had cautioned him not to chant only for fun. He always maintained a grave and serene attitude, somewhat distant and concentrated, whenever he set himself to chant the epics of his repertoire for an entire night. He had the same attitude when he performed *Ajäk* during two consecutive nights.

Only later did I discover that this recording, already transcribed and partially translated, was distinct from what Usuy had chanted during the eve of the wedding at Nägdaridiq; that there was also a Chant I and a rather long narrated prelude, as well as all the nights corresponding to Chants III, IV, V, and VI, of which I completed the synopsis with Mäsinu on the very day following their respective performances and recordings. Since then, I have transcribed and translated the narrated prelude (fifty pages), of which a summary is presented in the Appendix, and Chant I. The translation has not yet been published, but a detailed synopsis of it is given in the Appendix. After having spent an entire agricultural cycle, I left the highlands of Palawan at the end of October 1972; by then, the translation of Chant II was completed. I checked the transcription of it in 1976 during a three-month stay, and in October 1978 I was able to provide a mimeographed edition. The whole translation, as well as that of two other epics (*Mämimimbin* and *Durus Mata*), was then revised. This year these three epics have been stored in a computer in order to be ready for another type of text analysis. In addition, since 1990, *Käswakan* has been transcribed and translated. Since 1988, four video films have been made while Buntäli was chanting *Datuq ät Pänarangsangan* (6-7 nights); two more nights were taped and filmed during July and September 1993.

Translation of the text

Let us consider the text itself and the problems encountered in translating it that led me to make certain choices. Usuy's style of chanting, mentioned earlier, is a very traditional one in the highlands and represents a certain aesthetic—not the only one—in the art of chanting epics among the Palawan. It is an ornamented style—*mäkansang burak jä*, “many flowers,” say the Palawan—with numerous vocal ornamentations for, they add, Usuy “has long breath.”

These “flowers” in the text are the fillers that support the melodic line and favor a certain melismatic development characteristic of this area

of the world, mainly among Islamized groups like the Magindanao, Taosug, and Sama. These fillers include the following: *bäng banar*, “really true;” *bä sälus*, an exclamation implying compassion, pity, and sympathy; *kunuq*, “they say,” “the story says,” “the story relates,” “he says;” and *täjän*, a particle expressing a wish, such as “may it happen,” “may it be possible,” or regret, “alas.”

Usuy very often uses these virtually meaningless phrases in uttering his text; this technique helps him stretch his voice over what can be called a “breathing unit,” very long at times, according to certain melodic lines specific to each character, as we shall see. It is a chant also characterized by many circumlocutions. Other bards who do not share this aesthetic have developed a plainer singing manner (a *recto tono* and a monody).

One can easily anticipate the effect of these “flowers” on the syntax. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, I present the integral transcription of the first “breathing unit” of Chant II, word for word, followed by an initial attempt at translation. In fact, I had begun to make a translation of this kind for the first side of the tape, and gradually came to sense an impasse. First of all, Usuy was absolutely reluctant to repeat the text during its transcription. He did not understand what I wanted; he summarized the sung text in a single phrase, and, of course, I was not satisfied with it. It seemed that this work, so sterile and fastidious, was tedious for him. There was something to all of that, certainly, but there was something else as well. The text is not in verse and therefore prosody does not function as a memory support. Nevertheless, the chant is a basic template for the bard and his audience, with melodic as well as melismatic waves, and adds sophistication to the performance. The text, performed in its entirety by the bard, serves the quest for aural and emotional beauty: *mänunga kingän!* “It’s beautiful to hear!” say the Palawan.

The frequency of these elements generated intolerable repetitions in passing from performance and oral tradition to textuality and a written tradition, and I felt that I could and ought to restore the simplified utterance, stripped of its vocal ornamentations, a syntactic utterance that would lose its complexity and its aural density but would allow the reader—no longer the listener—to experience the pleasure of reading the story and the dialogues in the shape of a play. In other words, I was implementing, while translating, what Usuy had candidly and with good reason proposed at an earlier stage of the work. As a matter of fact, when he no longer chanted, he had spontaneously eliminated the “filler” but tended to compress and summarize the narrative, generating a synopsis.

Likewise, for the first Palawan/French edition of the epic (Maraman and Revel-Macdonald 1991) I retained the following mode of presentation:

the libretto of the chant (corresponding to six hours and thirty minutes of recording on four tapes, both sides, 9.5 cm speed) appears on the upper section of the pages on the left; the syntactic restitution in spoken discourse faces it on the opposite right page. This righthand page, divided into two sections, also represents ethnographic and linguistic notes; while a French translation, very faithful to this second text, occupies the second half of the lefthand page. It is a diptych with four squares.

The translation below the text on the right hand page is not a word-for-word rendering. Rather, that translation is a reconstruction by a Palawan speaker, but not the authentic text as chanted by the bard. To place the word-for-word translation under the sung text would result in a genuine textual “delirium,” making it impossible to show the functional succession of words in the sentences.¹ I would like to add that utterance distortions are equally accompanied by grammatical distortions, and very rarely, articulatory distortions. As in the shadow play, these are “forms of stylized oral tradition.” They act as a stylistic “enhancement” of the local form of the language.²

• Hin dakän dagbäs kunuq Kudaman
// [opening syllable] as for me | person | says | Kudaman /

mänä bä in dimu bä
only the / to you | [closing syllable] //

• Hin dakän mänä bä pagkaq
// [opening syllable] as for me | only | because

näkäquliq kunuq bäng banar na
was able to return home | says he | truly | true / o

pinägtawän kä dimu
wife | you | as for you //

• Hin tyap-tyap kisyu batän kunuq
// [opening syllable] as / we | it is a fact | says he |

¹ For a description of the morphology and of a fundamental part of the syntax, see Revel 1979.

² Also designated as “fillers.” They are in fact enunciative particles with a stylistic and prosodic function in the chanting of an epic.

näkäbänwa kisyu ät kälaq in
 was able to build up a house / as for us | of | big size [closing syllable] //

• Hin ariq Kudaman dakän sälus
 // [opening syllable] younger brother | Kudaman / as for me / pity |

täyän kunuq bäng dimju bäng banar
 wish / says he / really / you | really true /

ukanän sälus in täyän in
 elder brother / pity | [closing syllable] | wish | [closing syllable] //

“As for me,” says the person of Kudaman, “behold, you, O my spouse, since you are my first wife, it is you still whom I am addressing,” said he, “really true.”

Kudaman says: “O my spouse, for you are my first wife, it is you whom I address.”

“As for me alone, since I was able to return,” he says, “really to the house, O my spouse, as for you, since you were able to build a large meeting house,” he says, “it is a fact.”

“I was able, as for me, to return to the house, O my spouse. And since you were able to build a large meeting house.”

“As for me, allow me, may I, says Kudaman, as for you, truly, elder brother, allow me that I may”

Kudaman says: “Elder brother, may I”

Text and music

Although the audience is present and stimulates the bard by exclamations and screams of joy and admiration during the chanted performance, the bards of this area do not sing with vocal accompaniment by a chorus as found in the area of Punang, for instance. Moreover, the accompaniment with the *bäbäräk*, a tiny ring flute with four holes, was already on its way to total extinction in the 1970s. The extraordinary beauty of these chants resides in their subtly varied melodic motifs, the quality of the bard’s voice, timbre, and color, and the magnificent vocal technique that allows chanting for six to eight hours in a row.

The bard of this region successively embodies the different characters of the epic. It is an embodiment by a vocal gesture and musical motifs only, not by actual vocal expressiveness. And Usuy had an admirable mastery of all the “voices” of the characters of the epics of his repertoire. This miming demands a natural inclination, a well exercised memory, much practice, and deep concentration in the actual performance. It also demands creativity and inspiration, for I learned from Buntäli, whom I visited in July 1990, that Usuy composed melodic motifs for each character. Whereas beforehand the epic’s interpretation was predominantly through a single voice, that of the hero, Kudaman, Usuy has admirably and creatively enriched it.

Listening to the wind in the treetops favors the capture of epic melodies, but is only possible thanks to the inspiration of a Good-Doer in the special place that is the forest. According to epic chanters, melodies vary a great deal; the narration remains much more constant but it too varies. Each bard enjoys great freedom of imagination. Variation arising from the imagination and creativity of the bards affects melodies as well as narration. José Rilla heard several versions of *Limbuhanän*; he also heard several voices for the hero Limbuhanän. Buntäli’s version of *Kudaman* celebrated the honey-wine and *simbug* ceremony in honor of the Master of Flowers; Usuy’s version transposed the whole story into the rice-wine drinking ceremony and commemoration of the Master of Rice. The shift in ritual reveals an upper in contrast to a lower highland culture.

During the first listening sessions in 1971, I had the impression of hearing various motifs, and during the transcription, this aural impression was proven to be correct: these “themes” associated with the main characters recur with them and allow the listener to identify immediately the character embodied. However, in spite of a noticeable similarity of plot, the themes do not recur from one epic to another.

These motifs are very clearly discernible by the melody, although they are very closely related; in addition, each one synaesthetically suggests a psychological and/or physical feature of the character. Thus, for example, the melody of Kudaman develops on a low register and is characterized by equidistant intervals between the syllables, a recto-tono. This slow melodic line, slightly ascending, indicates a character full of wisdom and gravity, the two fundamental qualities of a hero marked by ethical behavior, and a profile equally suggested by his decisions and gestures. The melodic motif of Kudaman is the most frequently used by the bard, since it is also sung for the general narration addressed to the audience.

In the epic the sound pitch allows one to distinguish the different types of characters. Thus the various spouses of Kudaman—the Lady of the

West Winds, the Lady of the Ginuqu Trees, and the Lady of the Emerald Doves—have melodic lines developing in the higher registers. The Lady of the West Winds is characterized by an undulation of notes, as is the mascot-bird Linggisan. The latter melody is highly reminiscent of the flapping wings of the purple heron, which I happened to hear rising from a sandbar and flying above the waves of the China Sea.

The musical units of the text are based on a “breathing group of words” or a variable sequence of words or sentences embedded in an opening syllabic formula (*hin*) and a closing syllabic formula (. . . *in*). These particles have no syntactic value but a very interesting prosodic value. According to the bards, . . . *in* can be replaced by . . . *ba*, as in the repertoires of Mäsinu and Kundipal, for instance. This particle functions, above all, as aural punctuation. It signals the end of a melodic and semantic utterance but has simultaneous value as a rhyme, for it conveys a homophony at the end of a strophe, whatever its length, and is followed by a respiratory pause, a silence of variable length.³

The transcription that I made of the chant takes account of each silence and each resumption by the bard. A new line not preceded by a period in the midst of the breathing unit indicates that the silence is brief, that the resumption of the text is immediate, and that the entire strophe forming part of a breathing unit is not yet completed. Hence the basic unit of the text is not the verse—there is no verse here—but an utterance in prose of variable length, be it in direct address or narrative. The meaningless words or fillers can, as necessary, supplement the meaningful words, thereby facilitating the unfolding of different melodic motifs.

III. Mental text, chanted performance, written transcript, and the notion of “multiple drafts”

The long chanted narratives we witness today belong to a specific communication space: the space of orality. By transcribing the epic chant with a written alphabetic code, we are shifting from one communication code to another, from one type of memory to another. In the Western world, the first passage, the transition from oral narrative to written manuscripts and then to printed texts, was characterized by a slow

³ One may note that the phoneme /h/, of a very low frequency in Palawan, never appears at the beginning of a word except in chanting epics and love poems, the *kulilal* songs. By its very nature, it favors the attack or onset of an utterance on a certain pitch by expelling the air inherent to this fricative consonant, an aspirate, and thus facilitates the melodic development.

progressive overlapping as writing was set into motion and later as printing was discovered. It meant a progressive shift from one set of values, experiences, and devices to another. Today, we are the agents and the witnesses of another shift: from books, written archives, and libraries to computerized, electronic memory. It is a new communication space and an emerging new type of memory.

In an oral-aural context, transmission of knowledge supposes a constant process of reiteration. Recently, I listened to a lecture by Daniel Dennett, who was invited to Paris for an evening organized around his philosophy, and he spoke briefly of his “multiple drafts model.” I immediately thought of this as a fitting metaphor to describe the mental process at work while a singer of tales is performing as we listen to him in the context of oral tradition. He performs only one among all the possible drafts that he could perform and that he would favor on other occasions and in other contexts. In his memory he retains a mental narrative and modulable material.

In Palawan, the bard has no “mental text” as such—by which I mean a ready-made and fixed text—but rather drafts. The narrative competence of the bard is based on a narrative flow underlain by a pattern that articulates the various sequences and that unfolds to generate the scheme that I described earlier. This scheme is probably present in many, if not all, epics. Actually, the bard has no “text” at all in his mind, but a logical narrative pattern, a set of both visual and rhythmic images. This narrative competence is astonishing, for it deals with extremely diverse and always modulable material: narrative and argumentative schemes, values and cosmogonical views, topologies, associative networks. The singer weaves his text from many threads. This corpus of mental text in the memory of each singer of tales, who redistributes and always reactualizes it according to circumstances, emotions, time, and space, represents the world of tradition, but also and more particularly the bard’s personal world.

The very notion of “mental text” can be misleading unless understood as a semantic structure. For six nights, *Kudaman* portrays the heroes’ string of journeys and quests for spouses in various worlds. Each one is marked by a return home and an expanding nuclear family (polygamy and more particularly sororal polygamy). The story alternates a fixed center (the domestic space) and a quest in all the possible worlds (an extended space).

Elaborating on this proposition of cartography and graphic analysis of tales, J. Dournes (1990) has proposed the notion of “proto-image” and “proto-sound,” analogous in its immediacy to the images of dreams. Such proto-images are infinitely faster than the actual stream of narration. When there is no audience, Buntäli, Usuy, Mäsinu, as well as an Indochinese

storyteller, Jörai or Sré, tell the story to themselves without proliferation; in other words, the story speaks or chants within the singer, the inner sounds being precisely projected when the performance occurs.

As a matter of fact, this multi-level way of narrating is inherent to the human condition, for each time we enunciate or narrate we do so in a specific context. This context, specific in time, space, emotional mood, and also in intention, takes the audience into account. Indeed, this is a correct phenomenological description of any situation of oral communication: within the density of virtual drafts, we have to select—semi-consciously, intentionally, or involuntarily—the relevant one, the accurate one within a given context. As utterance continues, decisions are necessarily being made, their sole influences being the context and the relationship between the speaking subject and his partner or his audience.⁴

Here a circularity of reasoning appears and imposes itself on us. It is arbitrary to fix a version in written text, for in fact we have only variants of a constant pattern and a system of transformation among variants. Therefore, my publication of *Kudaman* (1983) was not meant as a “first edition,” a “canonical” one, although my attempt was to project visually on the pages of a book, as faithfully as possible, a breathing and rhythm perceived by listening to chanted segments as well as to silences and their variable lengths and weight, following only the vocal gesture of the bard.

The handwritten and printed texts are themselves one reflected draft among so many others. It is a text mentally composed, chanted, captured, and worked upon by a bard who in turn creates in a given context, *x*, at a given moment, *y*. In fact, the same process is at work with a bard, a writer, and a computer data analyst. The three types of memory—the oral, the written, and the electronic—are distinct in their apparent manifestations, but the results seem constant. In fact, there are three distinct visions of a text, as Vivian Labrie (1984) showed: (1) the inner vision/s of the bard, (2) the inner vision/s of his audience/s, and (3) the vision/s of the transcriber-analyst who materializes the flowing chant on paper. And I would add a fourth: the inner vision/s of the poet who composes and conceives in writing *his* version of the epic that will then be chanted, a situation of “secondary orality” (cf. Zumthor 1983).

For there are unconscious cognitive activities and conscious strategies involved in the chanting of an epic. But there is above all a great

⁴ In fact, it seems that this analogy with the oral communication process made possible elaboration of the “multiple drafts model” to suit the general activity of the mind; see Dennett 1991:136: “Since these narratives are under continual ‘revision,’ there is no single narrative that counts as the canonical version, the ‘first edition’.”

fluctuation inherent in “literary-oral” texts, for they are created through performance. Albert Lord (1960:123) spoke of the preservation of tradition by its constant re-creation. There are variants of the same text within a culture, and there are versions of the same type of epic from one culture to another—the Ramayana epic, for instance. But if one wishes to be rigorous, one cannot speak of variants, for there is no genuine original. Each performance is an original. However, for the purposes of analysis, it is convenient to focus upon one or another execution, remembering always that none is more original than another.

Hence I propose that the analysis of an epic should be carried out within its entire context, not only of its variants and other texts, the “co-texts” of the given culture, but also of relevant history, sociology, archaeology, geography, iconography, technology, and the natural sciences. The purpose then becomes to think about the text as an object, as a place where meaning manifests itself, and by various means to be able to elaborate descriptive semantic models.

Consider the case history of *Kudaman*. Heard for the first time in May 1970, chanted continuously and taped in October 1970, transcribed the following year, typed and corrected in 1976, finalized in 1979 after Usuy’s death, and printed in 1983 in France and then in 1991 in the Philippines with a translation in Filipino, the text, which is a transcription of the chant, has remained almost unchanged. This is the freedom and fixity involved in a mere transcription, which is not a poetic composition.

We have been in the process of making a book—a silent text—out of vibrant poetry in chanted performance, and this process has frozen one, but only one, of the possible variants. In the chain of reiteration there is a *devenir* (“becoming”), a creativity at work within a frame of reference that lives in memory. Far from being inert, the mental text is very much alive and manifests its ongoing incarnation during the performance.

Fixing the butterfly can be perceived as and indeed is a paradox, when one takes into account the vitality of creativity and collective memory in a society with an oral tradition, such as is present in the Archipelagoes. For by transcribing and establishing the text of a version, we are shifting the primeval function and transforming the very essence of the *epos*. An artist’s oral performance, which constitutes knowledge in its ethical, political, musical, and poetic dimensions, sets in motion a synthetic creativity involving the bard who chants and creates and his audience—the “silent interpreters”—who perceive, understand, marvel, and memorize. Hence in the chain of generations, knowledge is continuously transmitted and is in a perpetual state of “becoming.” However, the prestige of script and its progressive hegemony can reduce an oral tradition to silence. The

Old French *chanson de geste* from the romanesque world is an example of this phenomenon. But it is not necessarily the case elsewhere, and I think of India more particularly, where in fact variants are found in the written rather than the chanted form, for in India as well as in other southeast Asian cultures, memory is constantly being incarnated in various ritual gestures and events (chants and dances). Because of this collective sharing and communication process, the variability due to oral tradition in a given culture must be carefully considered and analyzed.

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APPENDIX

Synopsis of *Kudaman*:

A narrated prelude followed by six nights' chants

The *Kudaman* epic starts with a long narrated prelude in a tale pattern (50 typewritten pages) before the six to seven nights can develop. The nights reiterate the span of seven years that frames the ritual of commemoration of the Master of Rice, Tämwäy ät Ampuq ät Paräy.

(Prelude)

As the narrative starts, two cousins go to the river to fish. One of the two disappears; she is the heroine of the epic, Tuwan Putliq. Her father is extremely worried and asks her husband to go and look for her. This man, Mutaq-Mutaq, does not make any attempt to do so. They send the message to the Young Man of the Cumulus Clouds, Känakän ät Inarak, and he proceeds to the pool of water, notices a scale from a crocodile, and is finally able to bring back the tiny nail of the woman after picking it from between the deepest teeth of the oldest crocodile. The father of the girl had promised to give him his daughter if he took the risks and let him take the nail to his house. The young lady, suffocating in the betel-nut box where she was deposited as a tiny nail, opens it and reappears as sparkling bamboo; the house glitters like the rising sun.

(Chant I)

Hence Tuwan Putliq becomes the wife of the Young Man of the Clouds—she owes him her life. This theme is immediately followed by the Lady of the Spirits of the Sea seducing the Young Man of the Clouds while she is the spouse of *Kudaman*. Here, for the first time, the hero appears. As the Young Man of the Clouds seizes the Lady, Tuwan Putliq leaves him (adultery). Meanwhile, *Kudaman* sends the Linamin ät Säqitan Dagat to

her father, Surutan Tamparan, the Sultan of the Shore, with no comment (repudiation). As Kudaman leaves, he meets Tuwan Putliq on his way and offers her betel to chew. This gesture amounts to a request to marry her. When she accepts the betel nut, we know she consents. Thus she becomes his first wife. Meanwhile, Surutan Tamparan discovers his daughter's transgression and threatens to cut off her head with the Scissors of the World. She submits to this punishment but comes out of the ordeal more glamorous than ever. She is eager to meet Kudaman again. A new episode presents Mutaq-Mutaq paying a visit to Kudaman, offering to make a blood pact with him. They exchange gifts to seal their agreement ritually. They live under the same roof. Kudaman convenes a meeting to offer a rice-wine drinking feast. He prepares 180 jars and gongs are played to invite all around. Before joining this festive occasion, the Sultan of the Shore pronounces his judgment on the abduction of his daughter. The fine is 180 plates. He reinforces this judgment with a complementary one to avoid any conflict between Kudaman and Mutaq-Mutaq, since they are now blood brothers. Kudaman leaves for new countries in search of beautiful clothes. He rides his pet bird, the purple heron, Linggisian, and entrusts his wife to Mutaq-Mutaq, the former husband of Tuwan Putliq, since he will be absent for seven years. The hero buys clothes from the Sultan of the Shore and, on his way, meets the Lady of the Emerald Dove. As he returns home, he stops over to put her in his betel-nut box. Welcomed back by Tuwan Putliq, he is informed that the Lady of the Good Spirits of the Sea has returned (his former wife) to him and has become, by pact, the sister of Tuwan Putliq. Then he introduces the Lady of the Emerald Dove. They are now three sisters. An exchange of rings follows. The hero leaves once more, entrusting his new wives, *duwäy*, to his first wife, *puqun*. She is the eldest, they are the younger. During this voyage, it is the Lady of the Pine Trees who is stricken to the heart by the beauty of the bird and the bird's master likewise. Another woman stops over and becomes his fourth wife. They behave toward each other as "sisters."

(Chant II) (A ritual feast is planned in a peaceful world)

In togetherness they agree to build up a large meeting house in order to celebrate the rice-wine drinking ceremony. They start to play the gongs and rejoice, inviting all around. The hero makes the jars simply by opposing his hands.

(Revelation of danger by a dream)

But a sudden dream interrupts the feast, revealing the coming of threatening visitors and their intention of capturing and taking away Kudaman's four ravishing wives. But the hero is a man of wisdom who wants to avoid a war, for violence is a moral mistake towards Ämpuq, the "Master." As the Ilanän come, he and his household are ready to face these aggressive visitors. Courtesy and refined peaceful manners, as opposed to brutality and violent manners, are exemplified.

(Violence and war)

The fight starts, and Mutaq-Mutaq cannot refrain from entering a celestial battle with his magic devices. He is followed by the brave Känakän ät Inarak. Finally, Kudaman enters the fight in order to save them and takes leave of his wives, offering them basil as a token-flower. The fight turns out to be a magic game between a violent outsider chief and a wise autochthonous headman. It ends with Kudaman's victory and Ilanän's death.

(The order of the world is restored: life resumes)

On the way back, they visit Limbuanän, Kudaman's first cousin, who recently married the Lady of the Pine Trees. After seven years, when the whole party reaches the house, the hero's welcome by his four wives is a model of behavior. Calm, dignity, and subtle tenderness are the basic constituents. Before the drinking feast resumes, they have to conduct a jural debate on the marriage of Limbuanän. The advice to the young couple is reiterated; among these counsels is good behavior between husband and wife, duties toward the affinal relations, and observation of the main principle of the law, *Saraq*.

(The feast as a symbol of peace and harmony)

The music of gongs resumes and the ladies start to enter the dance. After three nights, they open the jars and follow the "Custom of the Jar." The Sultan of the Shore, his seven wives, and numerous followers are present and, being Kudaman's father-in-law, the Sultan is the first to drink (respect to the eldest and to affinal relations). All of them successively enter the state of drunkenness and carefully watch over each other during the "trip." Kudaman is the last one to drink and the Lady of Hooks attends him. Seduced by her graceful care and beauty, Kudaman plans to take her as elder wife.

(Mercy to his enemies)

He brings the Ilanän back to life by spitting betel nut, reiterating a mythical gesture from the creation of the world. Their blood pact is to lay down their arms. After a decision by the Supreme Judge, they have to cut Tuwan Putliq into two halves, but she comes out of this ordeal as beautiful as ever. The Radja take leave, followed by Känakän ät Inarak and all the other guests. They are hoping for another feast in the near future.

(Chant III)

This feast is to be hosted by the Sultan of Another World. Kudaman and his four wives fly on the Linggisän, their mount. There they also meet the Ilanän, who declare they have no aggressive intentions. By turn, the guests become inebriated and each trip is described in its specific intensity. But Limbuanän asks to stop the playing of gongs, for an excess would offend the Weaver of the World. Then Kudaman makes the voyage, *ulit*, a shamanistic experience that brings him into communication with the Weaver of the World, Nägsalad. He is offered the jars but also warned against any act of violence. After a general leavetaking, they all return to their homes.

(Chant IV)

Before leaving for a new country—on a quest for a new spouse—Kudaman once more entrusts his secondary wives to his first wife, Tuwan Putliq. She feels sorrowful and begs him not to leave. In spite of Mutaq-Mutaq's opposition, however, Kudaman never cancels his plans or resists his desires. The hero leaves for seven years, offering a basil flowerpot as an icon of his person (alive or dead) while he travels. The rich merchant welcomes him with courtesy and presents his visitor with magnificent gold rings with a delicate flower as their central motif. Kudaman is invited to stay, but declines the invitation and returns, exhausted, to his house. He refuses to chew, and the wives carry him in their arms like a pillow, when suddenly he disappears. The four of them search for him, projecting themselves into the median space and mingling with the stars. The brave Lady of the Ginuqu Tree reaches Amuq's abode and questions him. He reveals to her the

essence of Kudaman's magical power. She shares this knowledge with her "sisters" and all four of them approach him and bring him back home. As soon as he returns, he plans another feast and invites the Sultan and Säwragar. The flying mount is sent to fetch them. During the fourth night of rice-wine drinking, Kudaman escapes the vigilance of his four wives and absorbs 180 jars, then consumes the whole stock of sugar canes. As he turns into a cloud, Limbuanän assists him in his trip. This time he falls to the center of the earth. The Lady of the Young Men seizes him in her hand and cures him, wiping his face with a scarf in order to appease him and to bring him back to consciousness. Since they are attracted to each other, he decides to bring her back with him. There are now five "sisters" and the house becomes silent after the departure of all the visitors. They are alone.

(Chant V)

As in the past, and for seven years, Kudaman undertakes a journey in quest of beautiful ornaments for his spouses. (The reiteration of the travel motif is the basic dynamic principle of the narrative. This epic is basically a quest for spouses in a society where polygamy was the rule.) By passing in the sky on his flying carriage, Kudaman seduces the very beautiful Lady of the Sandbar, Linamin ät Balintang. On his way back, he stops over and makes her his wife. It is a case of *agaw ät tumang* (abduction of a fiancée), and she is introduced to the others as the seventh spouse, hence becoming the seventh "sister." The marriage and the feast of drinking rice wine are celebrated, and it is the turn of the Lady of Anduwanän, the Abode of Ampuq, to fall in love with the bird and his master. During the feast, Limbuanän and Kudaman refrain from drinking. Kudaman asks his first cousin to fill up the jars in the future and thus ensure the continuity of the rituals commemorating the Master of Rice.

(Chant VI)

Mutaq-Mutaq is sent to Limbuanän to organize the next feast; he does not forget his promise and prepares the yeast and the jars. As the celebration starts, the Supreme Judge and the Sultan together with his seven daughters attend, but Kudaman decides to depart for an unknown world. On his way, he captures the love of Linamin ät Mälana, the Lady of the Oil of the World, and farther on, the Lady of the Void. When he returns and they reach an agreement, he introduces these two ladies to the others and they all become sisters. Once the marriage is celebrated, the rice-wine feast can be held. But the Lady of the Hawks comes to attend Kudaman in his drunken state, according to a prior agreement between the two, and by gratitude he wishes her to become his tenth wife. Here is a lady with no dowry to pay, for she has no relatives. Meanwhile, Känakän ät Inarak marries the seventh daughter of the Sultan. As dowry, the latter provides a river flowing down from the sky to the Sultan's residence, while a syzygyum tree and a grapefruit tree continue to bear the most beautiful fruit the whole year long.

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