

BAKUNAWA and the SEVEN MOONS: The Original Story (with translation and annotations)

Most of the recent literary interpretations of **Bakunawa** can be sourced to renowned folklorist **Damiana Eugenio**'s re-telling of the myth in her collected compilation "*Philippine Folk Literature: The Myths*". This, however, was imagined from an earlier documentation by **Fernando Buysler**, a Philippine poet, publisher, and priest.

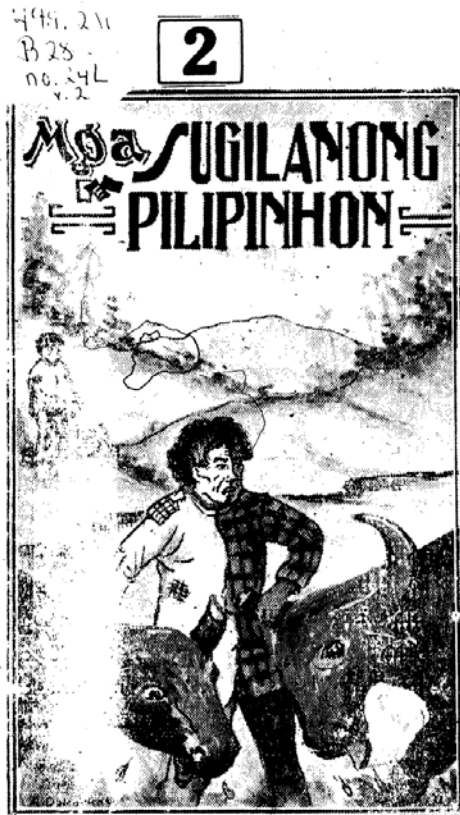
Fernando A. Buysler was born to a wealthy family on May 30, 1879 in Kalunangan in the town of Merida in the province of Leyte. He grew up in Caridad, in the town of Baybay, Leyte.

At 17 years old, Buysler became secretary to the Leyte guerilla force leader during the Philippine revolution in 1896. During the Philippine-American War, he served under the commands of Filipino revolutionary leaders.

After finishing his studies to be a priest in a seminary of the Philippine Independent Church, he was ordained by Manila Bishop Jose Evangelista in 1905 and then assigned in the towns of Almeria, Leyte and Placer, Surigao. He eventually became the bishop of the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Leyte, Samar, Masbate, and Surigao.

He compiled Cebuano traditional oral poetry and old verse forms, which he published in anthologies that were considered seminal in Cebuano literature: *Mga Awit sa Kabukiran: Mga Balitaw, Kolilisi, Mga Garay ug mga Balak nga Hinapid* (*Mountain Songs: Balitaw, Kolilisi, Verses, and Braided Poems*) which was completed in 1911 and *Mga Awit sa Kabukiran* (*Mountain Songs*) which was completed in 1912.

He wrote over 20 books in various genres, was one of the early writers who wrote short stories and initiated the study of Visayan folklore through *Mga Awit sa Kabukiran* and *Mga Sugilanong Karaan* (*Old Stories*) in 1913. He also published a newsletter called *Gacetta* in 1897, and the Aglipayan periodicals *Yutang Natawhan* (*Motherland*) in 1904 and *Ang Salampati* (*The Dove*) from 1920-1924.



The story of Bakunawa and the Seven Moons was first documented in *Mga Sugilanong Karaan* 1913 by Buyser. The story gained wider recognition when was published in 1926 as part of the *Mga Sugilanong Pilinhon* (Folk lore Filipino) collection where Buyser ends with his personal experience surrounding the belief in Bakunawa. Below is the original Bisaya story as it was meant to be told.

English translations by A.J. Laid

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ANG BAKUNAWA (Sugilanon)

Matod pa sa mga karaang pilipinhon nga sa pagbuhat ni Bathala sa Bulan (1) gihimo niyang pito aron magahayag kanunay sa pito ka gabii sa simana (2). Ang mga gabii kanhi mahayag kayo ug matahom uyamot tungod sa pito ka "Reyna" sa kagabhion nga kanunay nagasiga sa

[1] Nagsugilon kanato ang Balaang Kasulatan nga si Bathala, sa human Niya buhata ang langit ug ang yuta nagabuhat usab ug duruha ka mga dagkong Bituon; ang usa aron magahayag sa adlaw ug, ang usa usab, aron magaiwag sa kagabhion. Ang nahauna ginganlan Adlaw ug siya ang labaw sa ikaduha nga ginganlan Bulan. Ang Adlaw takos ta ikapananglit nga mao ang larawan ni Jesucristo nga ghiagu-man sa mga matarong ang iyang kahayag, nga nanagpuyo sa bathalan-ong gracia. Ug ang Bulan maingon ta nga mao si Maria nga tungod kaniya managpakakitag kahayag ang mga makasasala nga nanagpuyo sa gabii sa sala. Sa pagkamatuod nga kong ang Bulan anaa mahamutang sa kinatung-an sa langit ug sa yuta, mao man usab si Maria anaa siya mahamutang sa taliwala ni Bathala ug sa mga tawong makasasala, aron siya magahayag kanila.

[2] Makapahinumdom kanato sa 7 ka Simbahan sa Asia, Epheso, Smirma, Pergamo, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia ug Laodicea; sa 7 ka kandelerong bulawan; sa 7 ka Bituon ug sa 7 ka "lampara" nga nagkasiga nga giasoy ni San Juan sa Apoc. 1, 11-20.

The Bakunawa (A Story)

According to the ancient folks, when Bathala created the Moon^[1], he created seven of it so that each would illuminate one night of the week^[2]. The nights were bright and ever so beautiful because of these seven “Queens” who continuously shone in the night sky.

^[1]The Holy Scriptures tell us of a story about two colossal stars that Bathala created after He did the sky and the earth; one would give light to the day while the other would light up the night. The former was named Adlaw (Sun) and he* was greater than the latter that was named Bulan (Moon). The Adlaw was considered the face of Jesus Christ whose brightness, a divine grace, was worshipped by the good. And the Moon was Mary who gave light to sinners, and guided them in the night. When the Moon sat in the middle of the sky and the earth so was Mary who sat between Bathala and the sinful to give them light**.

^[2]We are reminded of the 7 Churches in Asia, Epheso, Smirma, Pérgamo, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea; of the 7 golden candelabra; of the 7 Stars and the 7 “lamps” that Saint John settled in Apoc. 1, 11-20.

Translator's Notes:

*The gender of Adlaw and Bulan is unknown in the text. Even in Tagalog, the pronouns “siya” (he/she) or “niya” (him/her) refer to both sexes as well as the pronoun “it” unlike the English language that has “he” for male and “she” for female.

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atong kalangitan. Apan ang kalipay sa mga tawo sa yuta wala magdayon ug kadtong katahom sa langit wala magkanunay kay usa ka mananap nga makalilisang nga nagabilikis sa kalibutan sama sa usa ka halas nga yawan-on nga gisugilon ni San Juan sa Apocalipsis (3) naibog ug nasina sa matahom buhat sa Makagagahom ug gisubad niya ang unom ka Bulan sa dakong kasubo sa mga pumupuyo sa yuta. Kining halasa mao ang ginganlag BAKUNAWA.

Sa pagtan-aw kuno ni Bathala nga ang iyang Bulan gisubad niadtong makalilisang Mambad ug usa na lang nahibilin sa pito ka binuhat; gitamnan Niyag mga kawayang kagingking ang Bulan nga mao na kanang makita ta nga mga “mancha” sa atong maanindot nga Bulan,

Sa dakong kasakit ug kasubo sa mga tawo sa pagkawala niadtong unom ka masigang Bituon nanagbantay na sila pag-ayo aron ang nahabilin dili na matukob ug masubad nianang makahahadlok nga Bitin. Usa niana ka gabii nagubot kuno ang tibuok kalibutan sa tiniyabaw sa mga tawo, sa dibal sa mga tambol ug agong, sa tinagungtung sa mga bayog, sa mga karatong, sa mga lusong, sa mga sag-ob ugb. nga ilang gipanagbasal tungod kay ilang nakita

[3] Apocalipsis 12, 3-9.

But the joy of the people on earth didn't last, and the beauty of the sky was no more when one night a terrifying creature, that coiled around the world like an evil serpent, as Saint John told about in Apocalipsis^[3], envied the beautiful creations of the Almighty, and to the great dismay of the people on earth, swallowed 6 of the Moons. This serpent was named BAKUNAWA.

When Bathala saw the creature devouring all but one Moon, He planted bamboos on the remaining Moon. From afar, they looked like "stains" on the surface of the Moon.

To the people's despair at the loss of the 6 Stars*, they learned to heavily guard themselves so that the one last Moon would not be taken and destroyed by the frightening Serpent. One night the whole world panicked at the deafening scream of the people, the banging of drums among other objects that people could get a hold of to produce loud noise and sharp echoes as they saw

^[3]Apocalipsis 12, 3-9

Translator's Note:

*Star and Moon are used interchangeably here. Their usage here perhaps points back to how Saint John used it in Apocalipsis. Refer to footnote number 1 on page 1 of the text.

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nga ang Bulan gisubad na usab sa BAKUNAWA. Ang tiyabaw ug singgit sa mga batá, dagkong tawo ug tigulang, sa babayi ug lalaki nagak-anayón:

"Tuli kanamo ang among Bulan". Ug uban pang mga sulti ug mga pulong nga masulubon mao day mabati niadtong gabhiuna sa tibuok kalibutan. Ang hilak ug mga pagdanguyngoy nagakasagol, ug maoy naghari sa ilang mga kasingkasing ang kakulba nga matapos na ang kalibutan kong kawadan na sila sa bugtong Bulan nga gihatag kanila ni Bathala nga atong Magbubuhat. Ang mga tawo nanganaog sa ilang mga balay ug nanagluhod sa yuta aron sa pag-ampo nga dili unta kuhaan sila sa ilang Bulan. Mahinuklugon kaayong tan-awon ang kahintang niadtong atong mga igsuon kanhi nga wala pa makasabot kong unsay "Eclipse". Ang basal, pinakang, binunal ug tinuktok sa nagkalainlaing mga butang nakagahob sa tibuok kalibutan ug diha na sila muhunong pagsaba sa diha nga nakita na nila nga gilua na sa BAKUNAWA ang Bulan.

Ang kalipay sa mga tawo di'i ikagsaysay niadtong gabhiona sa paghibalik sa Bulan ug ang ilang mga kasingkasing gihugpong nila sama sa mga bulak ug gituboy nila sa kahitas-an sa pagpasalamat sa Makagagahom nga tagi-ya sa tanang mga

the Moon being attacked by the BAKUNAWA. Children, big people, the elderly, women and men all cried:

"Return our Moon" among other unpleasant words. This was the only sound heard throughout the world that night. Cries and moans blended together, and took over the hearts of the people who feared that the world would end if they lost the only Moon they had left. The people came out of their houses and kneeled on the ground to pray that they would not be deprived of their Moon. It was a pity sight to behold that our brothers and sisters did not understand then what "Eclipse" was. The loud noises stopped as they saw the BAKUNAWA finally spit out the Moon.

The joy of the people at the return of the Moon could not be described that night. They lifted their hearts to the sky like flowers and uttered their praises of gratefulness to the Almighty who owned all

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binuhat.

Hangtod karon nga panahon na man unta sa kahayag ug kauswagan daghan pa gayod ang nagatuo sa Bakunawa, ug daghan pa ang managtiyabaw nga: "Tuli kanamo ang among Bulan" (4) ug managsuliyaw pa gayod sa atong mga kabukiran ug kabaybayonan kong mahitabó nga maga "Eclipse" ang Bulan. Kini gipakita kanato ug gimatuod sa mga "Eclipse" nga nanghitabó dili pa karon dugay dinhi sa atong mga lungsod.

Matuod gayod kadtong sanglitanan nga nagaingon:

"Ang tunob sa mga karaang tawo dili mapala".

Ug kining tunuba anaa mahapatik sa panumduman sa atong Lungsod.



(4) Sa pagkuha ko sa Almeria sa akong tinahod nga ugangang babayi, Ginang Narcisa Aranas, nanghilak ang mga tawo. Ug sa didto na kami sa lawod sakay sa usa ka baruto padulong sa Naval, ang mga tawo nga diha sa baybayon nagpagikan kanamo mituwaw sa pag-ingon: "¡Tuli ang among Bulan!" Mahinuklugon uyamot kadtong yugtua kay gikan sa kahiladman sa akong kasingkasing nalangkat ang pipila ka tulo nga mga luha, [Oct. 1917.]

creations.

Up to this time of progress, many still believed in the Bakunawa, and a lot still screamed: "Return our Moon"^[4] and those in the mountainous regions and shores* still practiced this when an eclipse occurred. This was proven to us in the recent eclipses that had happened in our towns.

It was true what an old proverb said:

"The footprint of the old people never disappears."

And this footprint was immortalized in the history of our City.

^[4]When I took the Almeria of my respected mother-in-law, Mrs. Narcisa Aranas, the people cried. We were already far from shore aboard a boat to Naval when the people at the beach cried: "Return our Moon!" That incident was very memorable, from the bottom of my heart tears dropped, [Oct. 1917.]

Translator's Notes:

*Shores in far flung provinces.

Damiana Eugenio's Re-Telling in Philippine Folk Literature: The Myths

This version was translated by E. Roa from Fernando A. Buysen's , *Mga Sugilanong Karaan* (Sugbo, 1913). While similar to the translations above, it is curious that the decision was made to strip away the religious context that Buysen had originally documented. It has become a re-telling instead of a translation. Damiana Eugenio did not usually shy away from the Catholic or Christian context in the literature she documented, noting there was a syncretization, so I am wondering if this was a decision made by the translator.

The Moon and the Bacunawa (Cebuano)

There were then seven moons in the heavenly kingdom when Bacunawa, the huge serpent that rules the seas, first fell in love with them. From this dark retreat among the caverns many a time he had gazed with wonder and admiration at the "seven sisters" as they traversed the windy blue, and yearned to possess them. If he could only swallow them and thus be the eternal possessor of them.

One night he flew and swallowed one of the moons and came down to earth again in fiery haste. Months had passed when the moon he had swallowed melted. He tried to get another. He succeeded but this too melted away. He tried again. He tried six times, and he succeeded six times, but six times also the precious booty melted away.

Meanwhile Bathala became conscious of the mysterious disappearance of the moons. He tried to find out what had happened to them but failed. One night he was awakened by a deafening sound of drums and the shouts of men and women. He woke up and he saw that the last moon was being swallowed by Bacunawa and the whole earth was in consternation for it was in complete darkness. Hearing the shouts and the noise, Bacunawa left the moon and went back to his cavern in haste.

So a moon was left soaring in the skies and to prevent Bacunawa from swallowing it up Bathala planted a bamboo tree in its midst. And still the bamboo tree can be seen as a dark spot in the face of the moon.

Bacunawa has never given up; at times he tries again to swallow it up. But the people are always on the alert. They shout and make all sorts of noise when he tries to do so, and it is supposed that as long as the bamboo tree is not killed, he cannot succeed in his malicious enterprise.

In Conclusion

Since the publishing of Damiana Eugenio's re-telling, people have expanded on the story of Bakunawa and the Seven Moons, given the moons names, associating the moons to deities from other Philippine pantheons, and inventing epic battle scenes. I am a huge supporter of creative writing and using cultural heritage to explore creativity, but there is risk in re-telling myths. The original publishing is a representation of the people's beliefs at the time of documentation. Taking out modern introductions (Christianity) does not make the myth more indigenous. If these stories and myths had never evolved over time, this may be an effective tool, but we know this simply isn't the case. Stripping away aspects of these stories only serves to hide clues of how society evolved and syncretized beliefs. Where history and sociology are concerned, re-writing does not make stories better – only more confusing.

SOURCES:

Fernando A. Buyser, *Mga Sugilanong Karaan* (Sugbo, 1913), pp. 13-14.

Fernando A. Buyser, *Mga Sugilanong Piliinhon*, Philippine Church Printing (1926)

Damiana Eugenio, *Philippine Folk Literature: The Myths*, UP Press (2001)

Marjorie Evasco, "SONG AND SUBSTANCE: THE POETRY OF FERNANDO BUYSER," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* (2003)

ALSO READ: BAKUNAWA: The Moon Eating Dragon of Philippine Mythology

THE CREATURES OF PHILIPPINE MYTHOLOGY S01E03

BAKUNAWA: The Moon Eater

WATCH IT HERE: <https://youtu.be/s6xZNFvPklo>

