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The Komiks and Retelling the Lore of the Folk

Soledad S. Reyes

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The Komiks and Retelling the Lore of the Folk

Komiks (comics), which emerged in the 1920s, have captured the Filipinos' imagination, subsequently becoming materials for major motion pictures, yet marginalized in cultural studies. This article offers a diachronic analysis of the komiks between the 1930s and the 1970s to reveal the relationship between selected komiks characters and the folk tradition embodied in epics and legends. It also explains the komiks writers' fascination with the remote past and their construction of heroes and heroines. In illuminating the worldview of writers and readers and the meanings generated when texts and readers interact, this article problematizes the supposition that popular culture is unalloyed escapism.

KEYWORDS: PHILIPPINE KOMIKS · FOLKLORE · ROMANCE MODE · HEROES · POPULAR CULTURE

The history of the *komiks* (comics) in the Philippines constitutes a narrative full of color and spectacle interspersed with indescribable gloom and eerie silence. Like a classical five-act drama, its first act in the late 1920s, with the publication of *Kenkoy* in *Liwayway* (Dawn) magazine, caught the reading public by surprise, and problematized the meaning and function of reading. Long used to seeing only printed words in numerous chapbooks and *awit* (song) and *corrido* in the nineteenth century, and in the novels and short stories of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the public found itself staring at a new form—graphic images and strange-looking balloons in frames that must be read from left to right to get the story (O’Sullivan 1990, 9–26).

The second and third acts saw the *komiks* gaining in strength as more people realized the diversity of experiences it could explore and the apparently inexhaustible sources of its materials. In the late 1940s and throughout the succeeding decades (the 1950s until the 1970s), the *komiks* were a ubiquitous feature of the nation’s cultural landscape. They were unrivalled as the preeminent sources of *aliw* (entertainment) and *aral* (teaching) for millions of Filipinos, even as the likes of Mars Ravelo, Francisco V. Coching, Pablo Gomez, Jim Fernandez, Carlo Caparas, Elena Patron, and Gilda Olvidado, to name a few, regaled the public with stories revolving around figures such as Dyesebel, Darna, Kenkoy, Bondying, Ukala, Maruja, Bakekang, Tipin, and Panday, among others (Roxas and Arevalo 1985).¹ These characters rose to iconic stature. Hundreds of the serialized stories became the bases of movies most of which became box-office hits and starred the country’s most popular actors and actresses (Villegas 2006).²

The bubble burst in the 1980s and 1990s as the *komiks* lost many of its prolific writers and illustrators; some stopped writing while others were lured by opportunities to work in the United States. Among those who left were Virgilio and Nestor Redondo, Fred Alcala, Ading Gonzalez, and Jesse Santos, to name a few. The downward spiral had begun and the *komiks* became a pale shadow of itself, as they sputtered their way to oblivion. The prognosis in the late 1990s was that the *komiks* were in their death throes. Like a tragedy, the *komiks* must lead to a final act leading to dissolution. Such was the cycle that invariably led to a steep descent into nothingness after the public’s interest waned.

Resurrecting the Komiks in the Twenty-First Century

With the emergence and proliferation of new forms, undoubtedly brought about by dazzling technological inventions and innovations that took one’s breath away and which provides access to a whole new world of narratives in various forms, of novel ways of communicating, and in which space the reader is made to interact with texts in a winding electronic highway that seems endless, a form such as the *komiks* with its specific conventions and predictable formulas appears unexciting, if not totally irrelevant.

Among the newer forms that have attracted the younger generation since the 1980s and 1990s are the *anime* (animation) directly imported from Japan, and the anime texts eventually translated into Filipino. In this form, which displays an ingenious use of animation techniques by Japanese artists to create new settings and characters, a remarkable fusion of printed matter and television has taken place, regaling young viewers to follow the delightful stories in such series as “Akira,” “Robotech,” “Dragon Ball Z,” “Pokemon,” and “Sailor Moon.” Generations of readers, effectively weaned from the more established *komiks*, have learned to view the world constructed in the various anime adventure stories.

But find a niche the *komiks* have managed to do. In the process, this popular form has had to undergo some transformation as it had done when film producers from the 1950s until several decades later capitalized on the popularity of *Roberta*, *Darna*, *Jack en Jill* (Jack and Jill), *Alyas Palos* (Alias Slippery), *Lastikman* (Elastic Man), *Pedro Penduko*, and *Ang Panday* (The Blacksmith), among others, to attract millions of moviegoers. Films are still being made from *komiks* serials. But from the late 1990s until the present, television has taken advantage of the enduring popularity of the *komiks* to entice the public, including the younger generation, to watch the numerous *teleserye* (television series) on primetime television. The likes of Darna, Dyesebel, Captain Barbell, Lastikman, Panday, Pedro Penduko, Bakekang, Kampanerang Kuba, Palos, and Totoy Bato, among others, are alive and well, kicking, flying, fighting villains, and saving victims trapped in life-threatening situations.

To suit the new medium and entice younger viewers, the *komiks* characters and the situations they confront have to be “modernized.” Darna and Captain Barbell, for example, must don costumes made of shimmering, metallic material; must face new enemies (not only the preternatural creatures from folklore) who wield sophisticated weapons and eye-popping

gadgets; and must engage a world that looks like local versions of the settings for “Star Wars” and “X-Men”. The *fantaserye* (fantasy serials) must be packaged as contemporary versions of old komiks stories. And television audiences have lapped up the cultural constructs featuring young stars such as Angel Locsin, Anne Curtis, Richard Gutierrez, and Claudine Baretto, to name a few.

In 2003 Carlo Vergara published his *Ang Kagila-gilalas na Pakikipagsapalaran ni ZsaZsa Zaturmah* (The Astonishing Adventures of ZsaZsa Zaturmah). A deconstructive piece, Vergara’s (2003) series of narratives simultaneously subverts and pays homage to one of the country’s beloved komiks characters, Darna.³ The graphic novel sold thousands of copies, was staged twice to full acclaim, and made into a film in 2006. *ZsaZsa Zaturmah* is contemporary, its style is campy, its language is humorous and irreverent, and it squarely confronts issues of gender and sexuality. It is a delightful mix of the serious and the fanciful, of the realistic and the grotesque, of the folk mind and new technology. It is a pastiche that bears all the marks of a postmodern view of the world, as forever in a flux, as possessing indeterminate meanings, as forever open to possibilities.

In late 2007 a flurry of activities, well-funded and well-publicized, hit the headlines. The goal was to revitalize the moribund komiks industry. Both government (the National Commission on Culture and the Arts) and private individuals (komiks writers such as Joe Lad Santos and Carlo Caparas) came out in support of the objective: to bring about a second “renaissance” of the komiks through caravans, seminars and symposia, television interviews, and the publication of komiks magazines by the well-known writer, Carlo Caparas. He has spearheaded a number of activities designed to resurrect the form: a teleserye on Channel 7 (*Joaquin Bordado*), a komiks series in the English broadsheet (*The Philippine Daily Inquirer*) called “To Have and To Hold.” The well-orchestrated blitzkrieg has made the komiks the focus of interest again after almost two decades of neglect.⁴

The same passion and enthusiasm for the komiks are evident in the new form, the Internet. Hundreds of sites can now be accessed via the wonders of the computer. Komiks enthusiasts from the Philippines and other countries are making their findings and data on the komiks available to various sectors of society—komiks aficionados, cultural critics, ordinary students, and readers desirous of reliving the good old days of the komiks.⁵ With increasing regularity, articles on the komiks are coming out on the Internet—features

on the various magazines that popularized the komiks such as *Liwayway* and Ace Publications; on famous writers such as Mars Ravelo, Tony Velasquez, Alfredo Alcala, Pablo Gomez, and Francisco V. Coching; on memorable komiks stories such as *Pedro Penduko*, *Darna*, *Dyesebel*, and *Kenkoy*; and other articles and blogs that form an interesting series of commentaries on the multifaceted genre.

The academe, populated by individuals who did not dare touch the komiks with a ten-foot pole several decades ago, has slowly opened itself to the possibility of examining the komiks as artifacts worthy of analysis and theorizing. The trend began in the 1970s and persists today as more articles and essays on the komiks, based on original research, continually appear in journals and books.⁶ A number of researchers and cultural critics in universities such as the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, to name a few, have devoted their time to analyze the hitherto ignored popular form. Conferences and seminars on popular culture have included learned discussions of the komiks and the graphic novels, surely a necessary outcome of the evolution of the komiks.

The Komiks and Their Audience

In the midst of such frenetic activities, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the komiks, as a popular form, have always been identified with the common people, not with the upper class, from its inception in 1928 until its heyday in the postwar decades. Despite attempts to “modernize” the komiks through the highly derivative use of contemporary costumes and gadgets, the audience perceives in the teleserye remnants and glimpses of narratives that come straight from the remote past. Written in Tagalog, the komiks have always communicated with the majority, who knows and speaks the native language. The middle and upper classes have had their own reading fare—from the serious works of Hemingway and Faulkner to kitsch, the best-selling novels, the comic books in English that ranged from the Illustrated Classics to the DC comic strips and the graphic novels, the Mills and Boon romances and their spin-offs. But the komiks industry, in engaging the multifarious realities constructed in the komiks magazines for seventy years, has had the millions as its most enthusiastic patrons.

Although it is true that in the 1960s and 1970s the komiks started to borrow heavily from Western sources (e.g., Hollywood films such as “Gunfight in the OK Corral,” “Jaws,” “Star Wars,” and “The Exorcist”), television series

(e.g., “Charlie’s Angels,” “Star Trek”), discoveries in science and technology (various forms of transplant, cloning), science-fiction texts, explorations of the arctic ocean or mountain expeditions, jungle safaris, and Mills and Boon novels, among others, a dominant stream that has continued to sustain the komiks until now is traceable to the lore of the folk, to those numerous stories that comprise our myths, epics, legends, and folktales. In other words, the komiks are unthinkable without our recognizing their deep indebtedness to the rich lore of the common people, the texts through which our forefathers sought to make sense of their lives and thus engage complicated reality.⁷

It is precisely this tight connection between a modern artifact (which emerged as a necessary result of the technology of mass production) and traditional texts (which have accumulated numerous meanings in the collective psyche) that ought to be investigated. Darna, Dyesebel, Panday, and Pedro Penduko, to name a few, live on, even as they continue to shape the manner in which the public perceives the world because in these narratives certain structures, themes, and values that determined the production of the folktale, and even of the awit and corrido of the nineteenth century, have resonated with millions of readers.

The World of Folklore and the Komiks in the 1920s and 1930s: The Trickster/Kenkoy and the Epic Hero/Kulafu

The earliest generations of Tagalog komiks writers/illustrators did their work for *Liwayway* magazine, founded in 1922 and the first outlet for the serialized novels and short stories. The first komiks series, therefore, must be seen as one of the two types of narrative offered to *Liwayway* readers who, by the late 1920s, were used to reading Tagalog novels that earlier had come out either as a serial in newspapers or in book form.⁸ But the komiks offered something new—pictorial images and characters speaking in balloons. The novels were written in unrelieved prose in which the imagination played a more important function. With the serial *Kenkoy*, a whole new world of reading was introduced, where visuals served a key role in helping the reader follow the narrative.

In retrospect, *Kenkoy* seemed to be the product of the American era—a good-for-nothing opportunist, a young man who resorted to tricks and gags to get what he wanted, a Filipino who sometimes dressed up in modern attires (Hawaiian shirts, wide pants) and spoke in “carabao English.” His numerous adventures were excellent indices to the changing times when the country, at least in the urban areas, was being made to accept the lifestyles and mores



Fig. 1. An excerpt from Tony Velasquez’s *Kenkoy*
Source: Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 20

brought by the Americans (fig. 1). The narratives revolving around *Kenkoy* and his friends—Rosing, Mang Teroy, Aling Hule, Talakitok, Aling Matsay, Ponyang Halobaybay, Nanong Pandak—afforded the readers some insights into the concrete ways in which the natives were reacting to the reality of American colonialism (Reyes 1997b).⁹ More specifically, the series indicated the way in which the locals were reacting to the imposition of English on the populace.

From another perspective, despite its being a product of the new technology, the series *Kenkoy*, created by Antonio Velasquez, appeared to have some connections, perhaps indirectly, with popular characters from folklore, specifically from traditional folktales. Some of these earlier characters were Juan Tamad, Pusong, and Pilandok, all embodiments of the local version of the trickster. All were from the lower class, all were confronted with apparently insurmountable problems, and all succeeded in outwitting the more powerful enemies. They were products of a highly divided society, where the poor were at the receiving end of the power and influence of the rich. As critic Florentino Hornedo (1991, 78) argues:

The persona of the narrative literature of the original folk is the *taumbayan* [common people]. He does not have much reverence for royalty

and the nobility. He appears to think he knows better than the ruling class. While he admires their power and wealth—even awed by their social position—he nonetheless freely criticizes and lampoons the ruling-class manners. His humor is courageous, and politically, his is an independent mind.

These stories were graphic manifestations of how the various versions of Juan/Pilandok type managed to foil and even subvert some powerful forces in the community (ibid.).

It is important to note that humor characterized both Kenkoy and the trickster type. Humor was created because the situation being depicted showed some reversal—of Pilandok fooling the datu, of Juan Tamad getting the better of the rich man, of two lowly subjects wreaking their revenge on the tyrant Minamina in an Ivatan legend—in favor of the dispossessed, the ordinary audience of such tales.

If Kenkoy was the twentieth-century equivalent of the trickster from earlier folktales, then we have to look at another one of the early komiks characters who appeared to embody certain features of another genre—the epic. This interest can be seen in Francisco Reyes, who seemed to be more preoccupied with the distant past. In collaboration with writer Pedrito Reyes, Francisco Reyes introduced *Kulafu* to *Liwayway* readers on 7 July 1933. This was four years after Kenkoy was first introduced. In this popular series the reader was led by the hand to enter another world, before the onset of modernization.

The world in this serial was the universe known to the folk of centuries past, even before the coming of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. This was a world of massive jungles, of treacherous mountain ranges, of pristine valleys, of inhabitants practicing their ways of life, and of mysterious creatures from the preternatural universe (fig. 2). In his blog, komiks aficionado Dennis Villegas (2005) describes the origins of *Kulafu* and the setting of his adventures thus:

Heavily influenced by Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan*, *Kulafu*'s jungle kingdom was set in the deep jungles of the southern Philippines, where he battled dragons, *siukoy* (mermen), and other mythical creatures.

Like *Tarzan*, *Kulafu* was reared by the great apes. He was not born there though. Early in the adventure, young *Kulafu*'s parents hiked in

the jungles. While stopping by the brook to drink water, the young boy was snatched by a giant bird, which dropped him in the bird's nest as food for the young. The young boy fell accidentally, and into the arms of the apes, who took the boy into their care since.

In *Kulafu* the reader entered a world of pure imagination, where laws of nature were suspended. Here the reader penetrated a universe seen from a nonrealistic perspective, constructed by an unfettered imagination. As Northrop Frye (1976, 36) observed: “The imagination then is the constructive power of the mind, the power of building unities out of units. In literature the unity is the mythos or narrative; the units are metaphors, that is, images connected primarily with each other rather than separately with the other world.”

In the Philippines, various tribes produced their lengthy narratives revolving around a central character, the hero, who undertook several adventures in pursuit of a mission or a task. Some of these epic heroes were Labbaw Donggon, Tuwaang, Bantugen, Lam-ang, the protagonists in *Agyu*, and *Ullalim*, among others (Manuel 1963). In various degrees, the heroes represented or symbolized desired goals of the community. Thus, epics were constructs produced not only to entertain but also to consolidate and reinforce community values. These narratives constituted their exploits that would eventually lead to a transformation, within himself or within the community. The evil would give way to the triumph of good; the nightmarish experience would later lead to a dream-like state. Such was the fundamental movement in many popular narratives. For example, *Bantugan* had to undergo a series of adventures where, in one instance, he almost died, before a happy ending ensued.

By the 1930s, Kenkoy and *Kulafu* had established themselves as two major types of characters with specific features and interacting with reality in contrasting ways. The first hewed to the more or less realistic mode, a heady fusion of the humorous and a faintly ironic, if not sarcastic, tone. To this category would belong the braggart *Lukas Malakas*, the delightful brat *Popoy*, the perpetually fighting couple *Pambo* and *Osang*, the Chinese vendor *Huapelo*, the indefatigable *Akong*, and the village doctor *Saryong Arbularyo*, among others. The serials consisted of situations meant to produce laughter partly due to mistaken identities, ridiculous assumptions, and exposure of the character's weaknesses and frailties that caused consternation among the other characters and among the reading public. The characters were drawn



Fig. 2. An excerpt from Francisco Reyes's *Kulafu*
Source: Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 67

not from the upper and middle classes, but from the lowly and the frequently disenfranchised majority.

These early series, including *Kenkoy* and the numerous series spun off from the original, offered glimpses of life in the American period—the dramatic contrasts between the old ways and the new lifestyles, the changes that colonial society was undergoing as an aftermath of Americanization, even reflected in the changes in the fashion of the period. In a specific sense, therefore, an impression of verisimilitude was created in these series—the characters, albeit depicted with much exaggeration, were recognizable; the site or setting was familiar: a typical barrio lorded over by the *arbularyo* (medicine man), a chalet in Ermita; the time was definitely the 1930s, with the characters decked in the favorite apparel of the time—baggy pants, suspenders, lounging robes, modern beachwear—and sporting the Valentino hairstyle and the hairdos of Hollywood actresses.

The other tendency, embodied by *Kulafu*, was more nostalgic and anchored on the need to return to an irretrievable past. The mode was definitely less realistic, the tone was more heroic than ironic, the atmosphere was deliberately vague and generally idealized, and the principal trait of *Kenkoy*—humor—was not apparent. Francisco V. Coching's *Marabini*, a narrative revolving around an alluring female warrior, was one of the series set against the distant past (Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 71; cf. Meñez 1996a, 25–38). In these stories, the influence of the earlier folktales, perhaps in a manner that was not direct, was made more evident in their preoccupation with an idealized world, in the emphasis on the quest motif, in the presence of elements and forces that ran parallel with the forces of a much familiar world. The lore of the folk was not derived principally from myths (that dealt with the beginning of time), but from epics and folktales (stories that emerged after the formation of sociopolitical structures within a community), which celebrated the wondrous exploits of men/women who were superior to ordinary men/women (cf. Frye 1957, 186–87).

Retelling Traditional Epics and Legends: Mining a “Heroic Past” in the Postwar Years

The further development of the komiks, with their subsequent mining of the nation's historical and legendary past, should be contextualized against certain sociohistorical events. The first was the fateful decision of Don Ramon Roces, the owner of *Liwayway*, to publish magazines exclusively devoted to

the komiks, which by the 1940s had attracted sufficient numbers of readers. In other words, the komiks were no longer a mere supplement of *Liwayway* but independent commodities that demanded heavy investment for their production and eventual dissemination. The short-lived komiks magazine, *Halakhak* (Guffaw), was a ten-issue affair because there were not enough financial resources to support the venture (Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 11).

Don Ramon Roces organized the Ace Publications on 27 May 1947, and in June 1947 the first issue of *Pilipino Komiks* came out. It is interesting to note the contents of the first issue: Velasquez's *Nanong Pandak* (Nanong the Shorty), Jose Zabala Santos's *Lukas Malakas* (Sturdy Lukas), Jesse Santos and Damian Velasquez's *DI-Trece* (DI-Thirteen), Larry Alcalá's *Ang Kalabog* (The Thud), Vicente Manansala's *Prinsesa Urduha* (Princess Urduha), Tony Roullo's *Kolokoy*, Cagintuan's *Lagim* (Terror), E. D. Ramos's *Tibong at Tibang* (Tibong and Tibang), Fred Carillo's *Daluyong* (Large Wave), A. Y. Manalad's *Makisig* (Dashing), and Hugo Yonson's *Ang Buhay* (Life) (ibid., 11–12). Quite clearly these stories seemed to have been shaped by the tendencies that the komiks had displayed from its beginnings: a mixture of the realistic/comic and the romantic/heroic. Other magazines from Ace Publications were later launched. *Tagalog Klasiks* (Tagalog Classics) came out in 1949, *Hiwaga Komiks* (Mystery Comics) in 1950, and *Espesyal Komiks* (Special Comics) in 1952. The pocket-sized *Kenkoy Komiks* came out in 1952.

With a much wider space provided by the publication of new outlets, the future of the komiks was defined. The possibilities were immense for the production of more stories culled from a variety of sources—existing folklore, contemporary events, modern trends, and local and foreign movies, to name a few. No longer were the komiks confined to the humorous and the heroic. The komiks could choose to go anywhere they pleased, given the number of writers/illustrators that was steadily attracted to the industry. There were those who began to write and illustrate as serials in the 1930s, and there were younger artists to whom the komiks world beckoned. Thus the public witnessed the proliferation of narratives, which could only be imagined a decade earlier, that broke the barriers imposed by the narrow space it explored in the past.

The second major reason that could probably account for this preoccupation with the past was the trauma that was the Second World War for millions of Filipinos. This was a dark period of violence and systematic slaughter of the innocents, the pillaging of towns and barrios, the large-scale

destruction of structures because the country was caught in battle between two powerful countries. Reduced to ashes, the country was lying in ruins, its people helpless victims of both the enemies and their compatriots who had sided with the Japanese, and faced with a bleak prospect of rebuilding itself (Golay 1997, 406–19).¹⁰ The war created heroes—ROTC cadets and Filipino soldiers, ordinary farmers and laborers—who joined the bloody struggle and lost their lives in the process. The grim accounts and grim pictures from the Death March had been etched in the collective memory. The war had ended but the country still languished, troubled by graft and corruption, massive displacement of its population, millions starving to death, and horrible news of collaboration.¹¹

Kenkoy and his friends (including the super rich Nanong Pandak and the ever so fashionable Ponyang Halobaybay), Lukas Malakas, and Saryong Arbularyo continued to tickle the funny bones of a public mired in suffering, ordinary Filipinos who could temporarily escape from the nightmarish reality that constituted their lives. But how much laughter could be provoked at a time like this, when a sitting president could be killed with impunity, when the dissidents were knocking at the gates of Manila, when the economy was in ruins, dominated by profiteers and exploitative businessmen?

Two of the most significant pioneers of the komiks—Francisco Reyes and Francisco V. Coching—were eventually joined by younger writers and illustrators when the komiks published by Ace Publications hit the market. Among them was the well-known Tagalog critic and writer Clodualdo del Mundo who, by the late 1940s, was also getting recognition as a writer of radio scripts (his *Principe Amante* [Prince Amante] was enthralling the public).¹² The others were Federico Javinal, Fred Carillo, Nestor and Virgilio Redondo, and Alfredo Alcalá, to name a few. A common denominator among both established and younger writers was an intense fascination with the past—with both the pre-Spanish past and the Spanish colonial period.

How do we account for the emergence of these komiks stories that called to mind older narratives detailing the adventures of heroic figures?

A major reason was precisely the wider space created by the komiks industry that pushed the writers to mine traditional tales or explore storylines, which sought to highlight an age when heroic individuals battled insidious forces to save a community. This theme was prevalent not only in the epics of various ethnic communities. As importantly, the theme shaped a large number of awit and corrido that entranced the reading public from the nineteenth

century until the first decades of the twentieth century. Balagtas's *Florante at Laura* became so popular that people began setting the lines to music.¹³ The fantastic story of *Ibong Adarna* (Adarna Bird) was an integral part of the collective consciousness as it regaled countless generations of Filipinos with its marvelous tale of a quest undertaken by three princes to help heal an ailing king. Characters from France, modeled after Charlemagne's noblemen, came to the Philippines through the Spanish medieval romance. The public was treated to the glamor, spectacle, and magic in stories such as *Principe Don Juan Teñoso*, *Principe Baldovino*, *Doce Pares ng Pransiya* (The Twelve Pairs of France), *Don Gonzalo de Cordoba*, *Blanca Flor* (White Flower), *Siete Infantes de Lara* (The Seven Princes of Lara), and *Bernardo Carpio*, among others, that took the reader to a land of enchantment where battles between good and evil inevitably end with the pure-hearted hero defeating the enemies—the dragon, the witch, the mermaid, the evil nobleman.¹⁴

By the 1940s, Severino Reyes's *Mga Kuwento ni Lola Basyang* (The Stories of Grandma Basyang), which first appeared in *Liwayway*, had become part of the nation's lore. The image of Lola Basyang, an old bespectacled woman wearing the native saya seated in her *silyon* (a native chair), surrounded by her grandchildren, had been ensconced in the collective memory. More than four hundred stories had come out in *Liwayway* by the time of Reyes's death in 1942. His son, the novelist/editor Pedrito Reyes, decided to continue publishing these stories in *Tagalog Klasiks*. In the 1950s, Lola Basyang had become a popular radio serial, thus successfully reinventing the tales that appealed to more people as they listened with rapt wonder to the retelling of stories such as "Maryang Makiling," "Ang Dalagang Bukid na Naging Prinsesa" (The Mountain Lass who Became a Princess), "Ang Sirena sa Uli-Uli ng Pasig" (The Mermaid at the Eddy of the Pasig), "Ang Prinsipeng Unggoy" (The Monkey Prince), among other colorful tales (Villegas 2007).¹⁵ In Severino Reyes's stories we see the influence coming not only from local folklore but also from Western folktales and legends, such as "The Prince and the Pauper," "The Frog Prince," "The Ugly Duckling," "Lorelei," and even from the stories of Boccaccio and Commedia dell'Arte, the popular Grimm's fairy tales, and the grand repository of magical tales, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

In retrospect, Francisco Coching, writing in the 1950s and 1960s, produced some of the most impressive stories set in the past as seen in *El Indio* (The Indio), *Don Cobarde* (Don Coward), *El Negro* (The Blackman),

Dumagit, Palasig, and Gat Sibasib. *Hagibis* (The Swift), inspired by Reyes's *Kulafu*, and probably indirectly influenced by Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes*, ran for fifteen years in *Liwayway* magazine. His *Sabas, ang Barbaro* (Sabas, the Barbarian), for example, depicted the people's revolt against their Spanish colonial masters and offered a vision of a hugely fragmented society in the tradition of Rizal's *Noli me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891) (Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 71).¹⁶ Francisco Reyes, for his part, duplicated his success with *Kulafu* through stories such as *Talahib* (Coarse Grass, 1946), *Kilabot* (Dread, 1947), *Buhawi* (Tornado, 1947), and *Mahiwagang Simulid* (The Magic Thread, 1949) (*ibid.*, 67).

Clodualdo del Mundo, working mostly with Fred Carillo as illustrator, regaled the public with his versions of legends and medieval romances in narratives such as *Anak ni Principe Amante* (The Child of Prince Amante), *Babaing Mandirigma* (The Female Warrior), *Eskrimador* (The Swordsman), *Solitaryo* (Solitaire), *Apat na Espada* (The Four Swords), *Apat na Agimat* (The Four Talismans), *Gitarang Ginto* (The Golden Guitar), *Kapitang Bagwis* (The Wing Feathered Captain), and *Pitong Sagisag* (Seven Symbols), among others (*ibid.*, 68–69). Federico Javinal, Coching's protégé, went on to illustrate Coching's *El Vibora* (The Vibora) and Amado Yasona's *Kahariang Bato* (Kingdom of Stone) (*ibid.*, 80).

The utilization by writers in the late 1940s and 1950s of themes, motifs, and characters drawn directly from, or probably suggested by, popular legends was to be expected. As a specific form, the komiks were plot-driven, where characters were two-dimensional rather than complex, where the reader's interest could be sustained by the komiks' basically straightforward narration of events that transpired in the hero's life, where the story always remained as a cautionary tale as the good were rewarded and the evil punished. Color and diversity were mandatory, and so was the robust appeal to the imagination. The mode deployed in both the old, popular tales and legends and their reincarnation in the works of Coching and del Mundo was romance; the season the texts celebrated was summer.¹⁷

Another reason for the proliferation of such heroic figures, who were made to act out their roles in less than realistic situations, could be accounted for by the writers' desire to juxtapose the idealized world of the komiks against the misery and despair obtaining in the country in the postwar years. In other words, the komiks pointed to a world we would have liked to see as contrasted with the world as it was during the period—fallen, unredeemed (despite

the return of the Americans!), in turmoil, and cut off from its moorings. In *Hagibis* or *Anak ni Principe Amante*, the reader was led to a distant past and a colorful universe where vividly drawn characters interacted with one another in conflict situations that ended with the world being transformed. There was no room for ambiguity; the colors were either white or black.

Escape from this world was provided by the numerous komiks stories that reconstituted the elements of the real world and represented them in their stark simplicity: the *indio* (colonial subject) fought the haughty *español* (Spanish colonial master), the medieval warrior battled evil forces, the faithful lover man defeated his rival in a duel. The komiks stories dealing with the past therefore enabled the public to enter another world peopled by types—the courageous hero, the devoted lady, the repulsive villain, the friendly helper, the frightening monster, among other types. In the early stages of the komiks, fantasy became the refuge of the public surrounded by historical forces and powerful institutions the complex workings of which could not be deciphered by ordinary men and women.¹⁸

As the decades wore on, more stories about the marvelous and daring adventures of heroes emerged from the komiks, even as these texts created and recreated a world where fantasy reigned supreme. In the 1970s, the whole tradition of the superhero—a quiet, self-effacing, committed individual, gifted with a magical object—was crystallized in one of the most popular series created by Carlo Caparas, *Ang Panday* (The Blacksmith), serialized in *Pilipino Komiks*.¹⁹

The final reason why the komiks, in the first phase of their development, sought to “capture” a heroic past was the reality that, as a commodity seeking a large share in the market, it was in competition with the numerous weekly magazines that published novels and short stories. In its history, the Tagalog novel that came out from the 1900s until the 1950s had been shaped by a mode that might be loosely termed “realistic” (Reyes 1982, 41–43). In effect, this meant that the texts produced by the first generation of novelists—Lope K. Santos, Iñigo Ed. Regalado, Francisco Laksamana, Faustino Aguilar—hewed closely to realism, where the text sought to approximate the world by imbuing the work with details of time and place as the context for complex interaction among characters. Such was the intent of *Pinaglahuan* (The Place of Vanishing), *Madaling Araw* (Daybreak), *Anino ng Kahapon* (Yesterday’s Shadow), to name a few, which in the 1900s depicted a highly turbulent society in the grip of devastating revolutions and/or assaulted by alien forces.

However, as the nation became more deeply colonized and as younger writers emerged—Fausto Galauran, Gregorio Coching, Teodoro Virrey—the serious topics explored in the earlier novels appeared to have been replaced by more and more novels depicting the narrow world of families and ill-starred lovers. However, even in the most “romantic” world of Galauran, for example, the reader was made aware that society was undergoing radical transformation in the way traditional values were being replaced by modern beliefs. In this sense, the novels displayed some historical consciousness.

In the postwar years, *Liwayway* and *Aliwan* came out with novels that dealt with the recent bloody past, the Second World War. *Aliwan* (Entertainment) published complete novels that examined not the distant past but the Japanese occupation, even as the novels constituted a powerful discourse centered on the war and its impact on the nation. This trend was seen in Alberto Segismundo Cruz’s *Ang Bungo* (The Skull) (1946), Lazaro Francisco’s *Sugat ng Alaala* (Memory’s Wound, 1949), Pedro Reyes’s *Kulafu, ang Gerilyero ng Sierra Madre* (Kulafu, the Guerilla Fighter of Sierra Madre, 1946) and *Fort Santiago* (1946), Mateo Cruz Cornelio’s *Hanggang Piyer* (Till the Pier) (1946), Susana de Guzman’s *Intramuros* (1946), Macario Pineda’s *Isang Milyong Piso* (One Million Pesos) (1950), and other novels. This interest was proof enough that the novel’s realistic tradition had not disappeared and could be summoned when the need arose.

It was not only with *Liwayway* and *Aliwan* that the komiks had to compete for market share. There were other magazines that vied for the same market, such as *Bulaklak* (Flower) and *Tagumpay* (Triumph), which, together with *Liwayway* and *Aliwan* (both owned by Don Ramon Roces), were sources of serials that examined life and its many vicissitudes from a more or less realistic perspective. By focusing on the past, a significant number of komiks serials offered the reading public a glimpse, albeit blurred, into the period that the epics (oral tradition) and awit and corrido (written tradition), sold in chapbooks, recounted in an endless series of telling and retelling.

Retelling and Reinventing Folktales in the 1960s and 1970s: The Proteus-like Form

The stories set against the distant past constituted only one of the large number of discourses that the komiks unveiled to the reading public, and they mostly came from older writers such as Francisco V. Coching, Francisco Reyes, and Clodualdo del Mundo. To a limited extent, this deliberate jour-

ney to the heroic past could be interpreted as the writers' way of asserting the continued relevance of the past to generations that had become enamored of the present and the trappings brought about by the people's exposure to Western artifacts—Hollywood films, Marvel comics, American songs, *Life* magazine, and cheap American novels, among others. The narratives were meant primarily to entertain the public with their action-packed storylines, well-crafted and attractive illustrations, and plots that engaged the readers' interest. But, in the process, the stories resonated with the reading public's fascination for the mysterious, the fantastic, and the marvelous, that which was the Other of everyday, familiar, and often grim experiences.

The komiks world—already populated by the funny man Kenkoy, the adventurous Kulafu, the rebel El Indio, the dashing Principe Amante—was so huge that it allowed other characters to inhabit this fictive universe. These characters came from the prolific imagination of a great number of writers that joined Ace Publications, and included Mars Ravelo, Pablo Gomez, Alfredo Alcala, Jim Fernandez, Jessie Santos, Larry Alcala, Carlo Caparas, Elena Patron, Pat Reyes, Ramon Marcelino, and hundreds of writers/illustrators who would contribute to make sure that the komiks would remain competitive.

As demonstrated by the works of the pioneers, the same fascination with creatures not quite of this world, with experiences that had an otherworldly ring to them, with a vision that was alternately dream-like and nightmarish, shaped the serials penned by these writers.

The world created by Mars Ravelo exemplified the richness, diversity, and imaginative reach of the komiks. On the one hand, from local folklore came Dyesebel, the story of a beautiful *sirena* (mermaid) whose fervent desire was to be accepted by the world of men, and thus leave the strife-torn kingdom by the sea lorded over by the repulsive Bangenge. Her dream was fulfilled when she found love in a handsome violinist. Dyesebel, the character, would eventually become the basis of hugely successful films that starred the country's most popular actresses, including Edna Luna, Eva Montes, and Alice Dixon (Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 62–64; Herrera n.d., 94–97).

Darna, on the other hand, was obviously patterned after the American comic character, Wonder Woman, the modern version of the archetype of the Strong Woman, imaged in Greek myths as the Amazon. Like *Dyesebel*, the series contained fantastic elements—a magic stone that transformed the barrio lass, Narda, into Darna, the savior of beleaguered mankind; the ability

to fly; and immense physical strength. But unlike Wonder Woman whose origins were mysterious, Narda continued to live in a small barrio, with her grandmother and younger brother. Like Dyesebel, Darna assumed iconic importance in the collective psyche as her meanings multiplied in the films made based on the serial and, more recently, on the phenomenally successful fantaserye.

Mars Ravelo continued to infuse new energy into the komiks through such works as *Mambo Dyambo*, a dark tale of superstitions and voodoo; *Silveria*, featuring a talking horse, Ravelo's excursions into the realm of fantasy; *Facifica Falayfay*, which chronicled the plight of an effeminate man who discovered true love in a woman; and *Jack en Jill*, which told the story of a tomboyish girl and her effeminate brother, illustrations of a realistic thrust. Ravelo's masterpiece, where he used the conventions of the melodrama that was the stuff of Tagalog novels, was *Roberta*. Underneath the realistic thrust of the story laid the ancient motif of the persecuted maiden, the basis for Cinderella and its local versions such as Mariang Alimango, Abadeja, and Mariang Isda. Ravelo would return to this motif of the persecuted maiden when he wrote the novel, *Trudis Liit* (Little Trudis), serialized in *Liwayway* in 1962.

Elements of fantasy and melodrama, sometimes found separately, occasionally within the same narrative, also shaped the works of another popular writer, Pablo Gomez who, like Mars Ravelo, started his career as a komiks writer in the 1950s (Roxas and Arevalo 1985, 76). Fantasy determined such works as *Ada* and *Mutya*, reinterpretations of the character of the nymph etched in the mind as a spirit in sylvan woods. Melodrama was the major influence in some of the more riveting stories to come out of the komiks and included the powerful *Dayukdok* (Famished) and *Batang Bangkusay* (Bangkusay's Child), set in the slums of Manila; *Gilda*, a representation of the popular motif of the "prostitute with the golden heart"; *MN*, a story of love and revenge set in a hacienda; and *Eva Fonda*, a harrowing tale of a girl from the slums who, at 16 years of age, found herself being a mother. In some stories, notably in *Kurdapya* (Ugly Woman) and *Susanang Daldal* (Talkative Susan), Gomez demonstrated his penchant for comedy.

In a number of stories written in the 1960s and 1970s, the world closer to the natural world became the setting of some of Gomez's most popular works, many of which were filmed starring the film icon, Fernando Poe Jr. They included *Sto. Domingo*, *Kampana sa Sta. Quiteria* (The Bell of Santa

Quiteria), *Pagbabalik ng Lawin* (The Return of the Hawk), *Alakdang Gubat* (Forest Scorpion), and *Alupihang Dagat* (Sea Centipede). He also penned *Kampanerang Kuba* (The Hunchbacked Bell Ringer), probably influenced by Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In these adventure stories, Gomez featured a hero confronted with a series of tasks the fulfillment of which meant hurdling numerous obstacles imaged as villainous thugs or even Mother Nature's fury.

As the komiks evolved through the decades, their dependence on the lore of the folk (its use of archetypal images, universal motifs, its generally antirepresentational thrust, its idealized heroes/heroines, its deployment of elements from fantasy) deepened. Like Proteus, the god who could transform himself at will into any image he desired, the komiks tolerated no barriers in their attempt to forever reinvent themselves. Although the names of the characters changed, and new situations in new settings were depicted, the fundamental qualities of the lore of the common people persisted and shaped a huge number of serials. The writers learned to open themselves up to more materials from the West; such was the power of Western media to infiltrate an already entrenched industry. It was easy to borrow heavily not only from Hollywood films but also from American television series; these were exceedingly accessible and ubiquitous. Moreover, the heritage of colonialism was so deep that Filipinos tended to look to the West and valorized its values.

Indeed, the world had shrunk and, by the 1970s, media became the window for the exciting world of sports (boxing, basketball, chess) and served as the means to know the multifaceted impact of technology and the wonders of new scientific discoveries, especially as they applied to the various space expeditions launched by the United States and Russia, and in the awesome work of nuclear physicists and surgeons who were beginning to do different types of organ transplant. Ironically enough, the exciting scientific discoveries existed side by side with the growing interest in the occult and the macabre, fanned by the popularity of films and documentaries detailing numerous investigations into various mysteries around the world, and studies of the Egyptian pyramids, the kingdom of the Incas, the mysterious structures in the Yucatan mountain, to name a few. "Star Trek" and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" stood alongside "Twilight Zone," and "Outer Limits" and "Batman" vied with "The Exorcist" for the public's attention.

A cursory survey of the serials that came out in the 1970s would evoke a carnivalesque world, where the tragic and the comic, the grotesque and the

normal, the dark side and the light side, heaven and hell, dreams and nightmares, love and hate, the mighty and the lowly, birth and death all made their appearance, jostled each other for space in this world turned upside down. In his pioneering study, Bakhtin (1984, 24) termed this scenario grotesque realism, which "reflects a phenomenon in transformation, and as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. . . . The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphoses."

In this phase of the komiks—their so-called renaissance—the komiks remained an unfinished process, undergoing a complex process of transforming themselves into many images, even as the komiks world continued to appropriate both the old and the new, the local and the foreign, the traditional and the modern.

However, its fascination, which sometimes appears as obsession, with the foreign seemed to have been tempered by the needs of the reading public: a good, dynamic story featuring characters with traits familiar to the readers (borne out of reading/listening to texts that celebrated their deeds and exploits), whose adventures ended with a transfigured world where the enemy had been exorcized. Readers perceived this familiar world in hugely successful komiks stories that followed the patterns found earlier in epics and tales. In a sense, the complexities of life were reduced to a simplified view of reality that did not correspond to the reality out there but to the reality created by the imagination held sacred by both creator and listener/reader alike.

The heroes and heroines of folklore manifested themselves not only as Panday, Lastikman, Captain Barbell, and Darna. Stories such as *Kapteyn Batuten*, *Karina Kariton* (Karina Cart), *Captain Makisig* (Captain Dashing), *Captain Manila*, *Petrang Kabayo* (Petra the Horse), *Flash Ter*, *Magnong Bertud* (Enchanted Magno), *Super Balulang* (Super Cock), and *Tigrum* revolved around similar characters with some heroic qualities—kindness, compassion, and a sense of community. Even children assumed the qualities of heroes in *Pungkuy and the Flying Tapis* (Pungkoy and the Flying Skirt-Cloth), *Little Pedro and the Magic Bilao* (Little Pedro and the Magic Winnowing Tray), and *Tikyong Tiyanak* (Tikyo the Demon Child). Gifted with an amulet, a magical object, or extraordinary strength, all these characters undertook a specific task: to extend aid to the helpless people in the

community.²⁰ In these latter series, the qualities of a trickster and the traits of an epic hero were displayed by the protagonists.

In other stories using the world of sports as a background, the heroes walked tall after successfully defeating their rivals in sports where the country had not made any significant contributions. Thus, *Magic 5* and *Mong* celebrated the victorious Filipino basketball team, while *Blind Chess Master* zeroed in on the exploits of a Filipino chess player. *Holen Juan* (Juan Marbles) was about a champion golfer, while *Juan Tornado* showed the exploits of a Filipino world boxing champion. *Fronton Queen* showcased a Filipina player's expertise in this sport. The stories, which featured the protagonists initially as underdogs, predictably ended in a blaze of glory for these courageous characters. Indeed, what was quite impossible to achieve in real life was realized in this fictive world, which celebrated the world we wanted and not the world we did not want. As Frye (1976, 58) notes: "The world of art, of human culture and civilization, is a creative process informed by a vision. The focus of this vision is indicated by the polarizing in romance between the world we want and the world we don't want. The process goes on in the actual world, but the vision that informs it is clear of that world, and must be kept unspotted from it."

A large number of stories in the 1970s also exhibited this colorful mixture of the local and the foreign, where the foreign seemed "indigenized." This was obvious in *Momoy and Frankenstein* where a monster, originally conceived by the 19-year-old Mary Shelley in late eighteenth-century England, came to a barrio in the Philippines; *Oggo*, the gentle ape in the series *Oggo*, was also a local version of Shelley's creation. *Zuma* and *Anak ni Zuma* (a character from Inca mythology) followed the father and the son as they sowed terror in the islands; *Pinoy Houdini* dealt with the spectacular exploits of a local magician. Stories such as *Waway*, *Star Boy*, *Star Lad*, to name a few, presented the inevitable struggle between the local boy heroes and the terrifying robots and other creatures from outer space.

Side by side with these stories, which used technology/science or had references to events in sports and various explorations (space, arctic), were narratives that resurrected a number of preternatural creatures from our legends and myths: the *aswang*, the *tiyanak*, and the *kapre*.²¹ Darna had to face the Impakta and the Babaeng Tuod; Pedro Penduko had to confront the siukoy. The *aswang* was a central character in *Anak ng Aswang* (Witch's Child) and *Lahi ng Aswang* (Line of Witches), while the fairy/nymph appeared in

Diyosa (Goddess) and *Ada*. Numerous mermaids also appeared in the various versions of *Dyesebel*. In various guises, Western lore also continued to shape the trajectory of the komiks world as seen in stories such as *Maruja* (reincarnation), *The Hands* (derived from an Egyptian legend), *Medusa*, *Dragona*, *Kulay Dugo ang Gabi* (vampirism), *Herculiz*, *Sleeping Beauty*, among a large number of fantasy stories that came out in the period of "flowering" of the komiks.

As late as the 1970s, after martial law had been declared, which frowned upon magical and fantastic narratives replete with magic and wonder, major writers and illustrators continued to frame the world in a largely nonrealistic mode, drawing heavily on the lore of the folk. In the process, the lore became integrated with the powerful discourse that the komiks had become after fifty years.

Some Implications: The Komiks and the Search for Heroes and Heroines

This study began by describing the current state of the komiks, which can be termed "moribund," and the contemporary attempts to revive the industry. In the process, the discussion focused on the rather lengthy period—between the 1930s and the 1970s—conveniently termed as a renaissance. The essay argued that the phenomenal popularity of the komiks in those decades could be traced partially to the fact that the reading public saw in this form exceedingly accessible modes of retelling stories that belonged to the lore of the common people—their myths, epics, legends, and tales. The komiks teemed with narratives—plots, characters, themes, and motifs—that resonated with the readers already conditioned by years of listening to or reading colorful tales and legends revolving around certain types that combined specific qualities of people in real life, albeit presented in idealized ways.

Written generally in the romance mode and from an antirepresentational perspective, hundreds of komiks stories, collectively taken, depicted the deeds and chronicled the adventures of protagonists that stood out from the rest of the community, not because of class (for generally the protagonists came from the lower class) or astounding physical beauty (this was not a major factor in the narratives). They were exceptional characters because they had compassion for the victims of powerful societal forces or of nature running amok (as creatures from the depth victimize the helpless humans), and utilized what they possessed (courage and strength in some, and magi-

cal gifts from heaven in others) to ease the people's pain. But these heroes and heroines became recipients of something extraordinary because they themselves were gifts to mankind—Darna was a dutiful sister and granddaughter, the Panday was a good man and an industrious blacksmith, Karina Kariton was a kind person—and all of them lived with specific communities. As heroes and heroines, they were one with the community in their desire to expel whatever threatened the order.

In other words, the figures from the komiks that gained the stature of icons constituted a pantheon of fictional heroes and heroines, characterized by a deep sympathy for the plight of the powerless. The stark picture that emerged from these stories was the sight of the government and its various institutions that remained helpless and unable to extend aid to those most in need of help—farmers terrorized by greedy landlords, a community frightened by goons and hoodlums, the land threatened by plagues and famines, indios victimized by Spaniards. The terrifying creatures preying on them, haunting them from the bowels of the earth or from outer space, were monsters, possible objectifications of actual monsters that continued to sow terror.²² In the 1970s, the government issued guidelines that prohibited the komiks writers from writing about terrifying creatures of the night. The writers went ahead and dished out countless accounts of these monsters in their tales of fantasy, as if by performing this act of subversion the writers could produce texts that were eloquent displacements of the real world, where powerful forces were preying on helpless and terrified communities. As Jackson (1981, 4–5) says:

In expressing desire, fantasy can operate in two ways. . . : it can *tell of*, manifest or show desire (expression in the sense of portrayal, representation, manifestation, linguistic utterance, mention, description), or it can *expel* desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity (expression in the sense of pressing out, squeezing, expulsion, getting rid of something by force). In many cases fantastic literature fulfills both functions at once, for desire can be 'expelled' through having been 'told of' and thus vicariously experienced by author and reader.

In specific ways, the komiks stories are a complex repository of insights into the key role played by folklore, not only as a source of entertainment or

a means to teach values to the original communities in which they emerged and in which they were constituted. This is the role of anthropologists.

More important is the need to understand in what specific ways folklore—epics and tales—had been appropriated in the komiks and for what use they had been deployed. As this study suggested, many komiks writers in the first phase looked at the past and used aspects of history and legend in order to establish the continued relevance between, on the one hand, the past and its values and, on the other hand, the modern world just devastated by a disastrous world war and burdened with social and economic iniquities. That was a major factor that impelled such journeys into the past of the brave indio.

Secondly, a study of the komiks should yield insights into the ways the characters interact with the various components of the world or reality: with other individuals in the community, with society in general, with institutions in society, with nature herself, with the divine, and with their interior lives. For komiks materials not only tell stories but, in the process of telling them, they interpret life's experiences for dissemination to millions of readers. In a very specific way, the komiks constitute a powerful instrument to frame the world for its public, making it intelligible for the moment.

Finally, as argued in this essay, the komiks are an important component of Philippine culture and therefore should be viewed as such by the various disciplines—sociology, political science, philosophy, and history. Viewed from the particular perspectives of the disciplines, the komiks should prove to be a fertile area the rigorous study of which should forever shatter the myth that the komiks are an irrelevant product of greedy capitalists bent on providing a means of escape from the world or, more insidiously, as nothing but a “trashy, escapist, sentimental” body of texts for the ignorant masses. Indeed, it would take several lengthy studies from various disciplines to capture that elusive “komiks” imagination, that powerful impulse that has generated thousands of komiks stories for almost a century, even as these printed materials become transformed and find accommodation in other genres such as film and television, and even in today's graphic novels.

In a country desperately in need of heroes and manifestations of deeds that transcend self-interest, the komiks offer themselves as possible sources of qualities that common people perceive as the stuff of heroes. In its history, the komiks have provided countless insights into how people are constituted within specific communities, and how heroes and heroines have emerged, not

from heaven or outer space, but from within the community itself, as heaven's answer to the needs of the beleaguered masses. The komiks in their colorful history have been a haven of hope, a site where possibilities can be realized, a colorful arena where mighty struggles between good and evil are staged, and a means to express and expel desire otherwise unrealizable in life.

Notes

- 1 Roxas and Arevalo (1985) remains the most comprehensive source of data on the history of the *komiks* in the Philippines.
- 2 Another source is Reyes 1984.
- 3 Vergara's (2003) two-issue collection received the Manila Critics Circle Award for Best Comics in 2003.
- 4 On 27 Feb. 2007 the National Commission on Culture and the Arts, headed by Executive Director Cecile Guidote-Alvarez, and the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino, chaired by Rolando Nolasco, organized and sponsored the National Komiks Congress of the Philippines. On 28 Feb. 2007 the president presided over the awarding of Presidential Medals of Merit (PMM) to the "Legends of Philippine Komiks." The awardees included Antonio Velasquez, Francisco V. Coching, Mars Ravelo, Larry Alcala (all posthumous), and Carlo Caparas (Office of the Press Secretary 2007).
- 5 The Internet has become an excellent source of data on the *komiks* about the writers, illustrators, the serials themselves, and, as importantly, of numerous impressions on the komiks from readers from different generations. Some of the more prolific bloggers are Dennis Villegas, Ros Matienzo, Gerry Alanguilan, to name a few. Some sites are Philippine Komiks Creators (http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=Category:Philippine_Komiks_Creators), Komiks Blog (<http://pilipinokomiks.blogspot.com/>), and the Philippine Comics Art Museum (<http://www.komikero.com/museum>).
- 6 See, for example, Reyes (1970; 1977; 1976; 1997a), Flores (2001), and most recently Fondevilla (2007).
- 7 Some pioneering studies include Fansler (1965), Ramos (1971), Castro et al. (1985), Demetrio (1990), and Eugenio (1989; 2001; 2002).
- 8 For a comprehensive study of the Tagalog novel and its beginnings, see Reyes 1982, 61–85.
- 9 For actual texts and illustrations, see Velasquez 1934/2004.
- 10 This is an account of both the political and military maneuvers undertaken by Filipino and American authorities as the nation was plunged deeper into war.
- 11 For an excellent personal account of the effects of the war on families, read Nakpil 2006.
- 12 The soap opera was another popular cultural text that millions of Filipinos followed avidly, especially in the 1950s. Some of the other writers in this genre were Lina Flor and Liwayway Arceo with their long running series, "Gulong ng Palad" and "Ilaw ng Tahanan," respectively.
- 13 The works of Francisco Baltazar (Balagtas) have been the object of major critical studies since the turn of the twentieth century, for he is considered the quintessential poet of the nineteenth century. Read, for example, Melendrez-Cruz and Chua 1988; Reyes 1988.

- 14 Read, for example, the full texts of such narratives in Castro et al. 1985.
- 15 For the texts of some of Reyes's tales, see Bellen 2005.
- 16 For more on Francisco V. Coching, read Matienzo n.d.; 1980.
- 17 For the theoretical framework that suggests that romance is the mythos of summer, read Frye 1957, 186–205.
- 18 For studies on fantasy as genre, from different perspectives, see Jackson (1981), written from a Marxist/psychoanalytic perspective; and Todorov (1975), written from a structuralist perspective.
- 19 *Ang Panday* would eventually be filmed and would star the legendary actor Fernando Poe Jr.; it also became the basis for a television program and a *teleserye* starring Jericho Rosales.
- 20 For an analysis of the qualities of *komiks* heroes that appeared in Filipino films, see Flores 2005.
- 21 Read, for example, Meñez 1996b, 61–76.
- 22 Moretti's (1983) essay is an excellent example of the specific ways in which *Dracula* (a horror novel) can be studied from two perspectives—Marxist and psychoanalytic—through a rigorous oscillation between the text, on the one hand, and culture and history, on the other hand, in order to come up with a body of insights into how the novel's production and consumption were shaped by specific forces in culture and history.

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Soledad S. Reyes is professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, School of Humanities, Horacio de la Costa Hall, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City, 1108 Philippines. She has been an exchange professor and consultant in various foreign universities, as well as chair of the board of judges of, among others, the Carlos Palanca Awards for Literature and the Cultural Center of the Philippines awards. She is the author of eight books, among the most recent being *Rosario de Guzman Lingat, 1924–1997: The Burden of Self and History* (2003); *A Dark Tinge to the World* (2005); and *From Darna to Zsazsa Zaturannah: Desire and Fantasy. Essays on Literature and Popular Culture* (2009). <sreyes@ateneo.edu>