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Philippine Literary Studies, 1970-85: Some Preliminary Notes

Soledad S. Reyes

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**Philippine Literary Studies, 1970-85:
Some Preliminary Notes**
SOLEDAD S. REYES

With the proliferation of texts on Philippine literary materials, it is easy to get lost in a wilderness of words. A more formidable problem is the clash in the perspectives through which scholars and critics have viewed their objects of study. Adding to the problem is the difficulty of ascertaining the critical presuppositions and biases that have shaped these texts, for in most cases these writers have not made explicit their basic assumptions. Moreover, a number of authors seem to have simultaneously appropriated the functions traditionally assigned to literary theory, literary history and literary criticism within the texts. Such is the excess of energy that seems to characterize present literary studies.

Nevertheless, this apparent confusion is what makes the literary scene an exciting field to explore. In contrast with the past when little activity transpired, the present appears more conducive to literary studies which, especially within the last two decades, have concerned themselves with theoretical issues such as the nature and function of literature, the role of the audience, the tasks of criticism, and the role of the critic, to name a few. In one sense, current critical activities have taken up seriously what past criticism took for granted — the need to conceptualize critical pronouncements and to show why such critical pronouncements should be accepted. The question is not, as many scholars have slowly realized, the critical work's correspondence with the facts — that is, the primary texts — but the validity and acceptability of such a perspective within the chosen framework.

This article proposes an overview of the major trends in contemporary literary studies, especially those done in Manila, and indi-

cates the critical values and assumptions that have influenced these texts. Within this reading of critical texts, which is necessarily schematic, certain limitations will have to be imposed. Thus, this article concerns itself mostly with selected books published between 1970 and 1985. (Articles are used to reinforce some findings drawn from full-length works, or to point out certain trends which have not been fully explored in book form.)

The article is organized into two parts. The first section provides a listing of representative books dealing with literary history, theory and criticism. It also indicates the broad significance of such works without going into an exhaustive analysis of the texts' contents. The second part seeks to establish some critical patterns that have shaped these studies. At the risk of simplifying what is a complex process, the article will resort to labels as a heuristic device, and not to provide a reductionist view of textual productions which constitute contemporary literary studies.

LITERARY HISTORY

Of the three areas of history, theory and criticism, it is literary history which has preoccupied the largest number of scholars. This response is to be expected, especially when contextualized against the pressing need to produce texts that offer a general view of the development of Philippine Literature. This is not to say that earlier literary historians had neglected their tasks, for various literary histories were published in the fifties and the sixties.

These texts provided a brief discussion of the historical context and/or literary norms followed by selections usually arranged chronologically. When used as textbooks, these works contained brief biographies of authors and study guides. In general, the earlier works were used primarily as high school or college textbooks in Pilipino and Philippine literature classes.

Recently, however, critics and scholars alike have come to realize that the hitherto neglected regional literature will have to be considered more seriously before the label *Philippine Literature* can assume a more valid meaning as a concept that encompasses not only literature in the Tagalog-speaking regions and/or Philippine Literature in English, but the works produced outside the cities. Thus, within the last decade or so, a number of works have

focused their attention exclusively on texts written in the various Philippine languages and dialects. Among such books are Gregorio C. Huangco's *Waray Literature: An Anthology of Leyte-Samar Writings* (1982), Edna Z. Manlapaz's *Kapampangan Literature: A Historical Survey and Anthology* (1981) and Rosalina Icban-Castro's *Literature of the Pampangos* (1981).

Books on specific genres in the various languages have also come out. Interest in vernacular dramas has led to the publication of Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio's *The "Seditious" Tagalog Playwrights: Early American Occupation* (1972); Nicanor G. Tiongson's *Kasaysayan at Estetika ng Sinakulo at Iba Pang Dulang Panrelihiyon* (1975) and *Komedya sa Pilipinas* (1982), Doreen G. Fernandez's *The Iloilo Zarzuela, 1903-1930* (1978), Wilhelmina Q. Ramas' *Sugbuanon Theatre* (1982), Felicidad M. Mendoza's *The Comedia (Moro-Moro Rediscovered)* (1976), Arthur Stanley Riggs' *The Filipino Drama* (1981), and most recently, Resil B. Mojares' study of *Theatre in Society/Society in Theatre* (1985).

Studies in prose fiction have also been made. Among such works are Leopoldo Yabes' two-volume *Philippine Short Stories, 1941-1955* (1981) with a Critical Introduction, Soledad S. Reyes' *Ang Nobelang Tagalog, 1905-1975: Tradisyon at Modernismo* (1982), Resil B. Mojares' *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* (1983). Attempts at recreating the milieu in which the authors worked are *Sampaksaang ng Nobelistang Tagalog* (1971) and *The Writer and His Milieu* (1984) by Edilberto N. Alegre and Doreen G. Fernandez.

In some texts, a particular period is made the object of study, as seen for example, in B.S. Medina, Jr.'s *The Primal Passion* which examines nineteenth century Tagalog works, in Virgilio S. Almario's studies of twentieth century Tagalog poetry contained in *Walong Dekada* (1979), an anthology with a Critical Introduction and *Balagtasismo versus Modernismo* (1984). In other books, the writings of individual authors serve as the primary materials, as in Edna Manlapaz's *Aurelio Tolentino: Selected Writings* (1975), Virgilio S. Almario's *Jose Corazon de Jesus: Mga Piling Tula* (1984), and Susan P. Evangelista's *Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry* (1985).

In these works, the authors have taken pains to establish certain tendencies in the development of a particular genre, and the socio-historical forces that have conditioned the texts. Particular genres which in the past were not studied methodically have now been

exhaustively analyzed and their aesthetic qualities explained. Although the achievements of these works are uneven in such areas as editing and bibliography, these texts, collectively taken, are nonetheless manifestations of a new seriousness in literary scholarship.

Apart from providing a definite history of a particular genre, such writers as Nicanor Tiongson and Resil Mojares have striven to present the texts from a certain perspective to enable the reader to view the genre's development from a specific standpoint. In a number of anthologies, such as Virgilio's Almario's *Walong Dekada* and Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio's *Seditious Tagalog Playwrights*, works which had not been published before in book form, are made accessible. Almario's anthology, for example, certainly goes beyond the achievements of Alejandro G. Abadilla's pioneering *Parnasong Tagalog* (1950) and is now the most comprehensive collection of Tagalog poems.

Another group of texts are books that deal with the marginalized ethnic tribes. Such types as the epics, myths, legends, folktales, riddles, proverbs, songs, among others, have generated some interest among contemporary scholars. In the past, these areas of study seemed to have been the exclusive domain of foreign scholars such as Dean Worcester or more recently Donn Hart. At present, such works as *Literature and Society: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (1977) edited by Roger Bresnahan, *Salimbibig: Philippine Vernacular Literature* (1980) edited by Joseph A. Galdon, S.J., Damiana Eugenio's *Philippine Proverb Lore* (1974) and *Philippine Folk Literature* (1982), Francisco Demetrio's *Myths and Symbols* (1978), Antoon Postma's *Treasures of a Minority* (1978) and the series *Anthology of Asean Literatures* (1983-85), to name a few, have made available the riches of ethnic literature. In these texts we see the different ways in which various peoples have constructed their world and their realities, the devices and strategies they have employed in order to generate meanings. Postma's work, for example, gives a highly knowledgeable introduction to the literature of the Mangyans of Mindoro. Eugenio's massive anthology, on the other hand, presents us with the largest number of texts collected from the different regions of the country.

A welcome development, perhaps as an effect of this discovery of regional and ethnic literature, is seen in the increasing number

of anthologies of Philippine Literature that include non-Tagalog selections. Used mostly in colleges and universities, these anthologies are intended to make students aware of the different periods in the development of the country's literature and instill in them some appreciation for their literature. Earlier texts of this nature were heavy on history but inadequate as a way of training the students to do textual analysis. That imbalance has been corrected with the publication of anthologies which pay more respect to the texts than to history or biography. Some are written in English like Silverio Baltazar, Teresita Erestain and Fe Estanislao's *Philippine Literature: Past and Present* (1983) and Bienvenido Lumbera and Cynthia Lumbera's *Philippine Literature: A History and an Anthology* (1981). A few are in Pilipino which means that all non-Tagalog texts are translated into Pilipino; this path is pursued in Rosario Torres-Yu's *Panitikan at Kritisismo* (1980), Jose Arrogante's *Panitikang Pilipino* (1983), and Isagani Cruz and Soledad S. Reyes' *Ang Ating Panitikan* (1984).

Whether dealing with the history of Philippine literature, or particular regional histories, or histories of specific genres, these works should be perceived as the scholars' attempt to establish on firm ground the unique achievements of Philippine writers. Only within the last two decades have compilations of various texts competed with analysis and theorizing. What was largely ignored by people in academe as late as the sixties has now asserted itself vigorously so that studies in vernacular literature are as important as studies of foreign literature. Despite some reservations expressed by a number of critics especially those working in Philippine literature in English who still cling to the notion of canonized texts (akin to F. R. Leavis' *Great Tradition*), more and more scholars have discovered the need to examine native texts with less dependence on Western literary norms.

Texts written in English, which used to occupy center stage, are now viewed as parts of the national heritage, and not the whole of Philippine literature. A consequence of this change in perception is the concerted move to try to understand such popular, low-brow texts which spring from the imagination of the folk.¹

1. See for example, the views of American critic Leonard Casper, "The Hazards of Writing in the Vernacular," *Philippine Studies* 17 (1969): 283-96.

LITERARY CRITICISM

With the discovery of Philippine texts as proper material for explication in the postwar period, a number of critical works appeared in the sixties. Among such works were Ricaredo Dementillo's *Authentic Voice of Poetry* (1962), Leonard Casper's *The Wayward Horizon: Essays on Modern Philippine Literature* (1961) and *The Wounded Diamond: Studies in Modern Philippine Literature* (1964), Lucila Hosillos' *Philippine-American Literary Relations* (1969) and Antonio Manuud's *Brown Heritage* (1967), notable for its inclusion of essays on vernacular writing. In these early works of criticism, attention was focused on Filipino writers considered worthy of formal exegesis and who were to be consequently canonized as representatives of the best that could be achieved by the writer in English. Thus Jose Garcia Villa in poetry, Nick Joaquin, N.V.M. Gonzalez, Bienvenido Santos, Gregorio Brillantes and the older Manuel Arguilla and Arturo B. Rotor who wrote prose fiction, were some of the favored authors. Not much emphasis was given to the works of Casiano Calalang or Loreto Paras Sulit, for example, who were relegated to the background as minor writers.

Criticism in the seventies would not depart from well-trodden paths. Taking for granted what earlier critics had pronounced "significant," and without questioning the criteria for such normative judgments, a number of critics in the recent period chose to analyze the major writers and their texts. Thus such works as Joseph Galdon's *Philippine Fiction: Essays from Philippine Studies (1963-1972)* (1972) and *Philippine Novel in English* (1979), Ophelia Dimalanta's *The Philippine Poetic* (1976), Gemino Abad's *In Another Light: Poems and Essays* (1976), and most recently Alfeo Nudas' *Telic Contemplation* (1981) explored the different facets in the prose and poetry of mostly postwar Filipino writers.

Although generally textual in orientation, the writers of this period, especially those working on prose fiction, appear to have exerted some effort at clarifying the relationship between the text and its historical context. A working paradigm in these studies seemed to be based on the so-called search for identity by a people traumatized by their colonial experience, and seeking to establish their identity in this world. Essays on Nick Joaquin or

Gregorio Brillantes were premised on this understanding, and so were the articles on the art of Bienvenido Santos.²

If criticism of works in English in the seventies was alive and well, criticism of works in Pilipino seemed more vigorous with the emergence of a generation of younger critics who saw the need to expend their critical effort on explaining native rather than Anglo-American selections. Mostly university-educated, here and abroad, Bienvenido Lumbera, Epifanio San Juan, Jr., Virgilio Almario, to name a few, chose to grapple with texts in the vernacular, using what they had absorbed as strategies for analysis and evaluation. Drawing on various critical perspectives and schools of thought, these critics would inject vigor into the moribund state of criticism in the vernacular.

Bienvenido Lumbera would make his name in criticism with the publication of his pioneering study of Tagalog poetry from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, in *Philippine Studies*.³ Early in his career, Lumbera used the comparative approach to clarify the development of Tagalog poetry. Epifanio San Juan, Jr., on the other hand, proved to be a prolific contributor to journals and magazines including the important *Panitikan*. He submitted articles not only on individual authors (including the relatively unknown ones) but on the major trends in Philippine writing. Virgilio Almario combined two careers—as a poet and as a critic—when he started writing for *Dawn*, the newspaper of the University of the East student body. Gaining a reputation as an iconoclast, he became one of the earliest champions of formalism in criticism and modernism in poetry.

By the late sixties and early seventies, at the height of activism which was carried over into the universities and eventually into literary studies, several volumes were published. Many writers who in the recent past applied formalist canons to their critical works found themselves veering away from the ahistorical approach in favor of a more historical method and a more committed stance to what they perceived as the authentic role of criticism—as a means to politicize. San Juan published his *Balagtas: Art and Revolution*

2. See, for example, the essays constituting Joseph Galdon's *Philippine Fiction* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1972). It would be interesting to study how critical perceptions were actually shaped by the influence of critics, both Filipino and American, who were then teaching Philippine Literature courses.

3. See *Philippine Studies* 15(1967), 16(1968), and 17(1969).

(1969) and *The Radical Tradition in Philippine Literature* (1971) where such major figures in Philippine Literature as Balagtas, Jose Rizal, Lope K. Santos, and Amado V. Hernandez, were examined as socially committed writers. A major work in the early seventies which provided skillful textual analysis was Almario's *Ang Makata sa Panahon ng Makina* (1971), a compilation of essays written in Almario's formalist phase.

Immediately after the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, there was not too much activity in criticism; time and effort were exerted in compiling and editing texts. However, by the late seventies and early eighties, there seems to have been a resurgence of interest in this area. San Juan published his *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle* (1972), a study of a Filipino expatriate writer. Almario came out with *Walong Dekada ng Panulaang Pilipino* and *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo*, both of which contained analysis of twentieth century poems. In 1985 Lumbera published his *Revaluations*, a collection of essays spanning two decades of criticism.

In the same period, other works of criticism were published, diverse in materials and approaches. Among these are Resil Mojares' *Writers of Cebu* (1978), San Juan's *Ang Sining ng Tula: Mga Sanaysay sa Panunuring Pampanitikan* (1975), and Epifania Angeles, Narciso Matienzo and Jose Villa Panganiban's *Ang Panulaang Tagalog* (1972). In 1984 the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (Institute of National Language) published a comprehensive volume which included the winners in the yearly contest sponsored by the Institute. *Panunuring Pampanitikan* contains essays on the short story, poetry and the art of Amado V. Hernandez, San Juan also came out with his latest work on Philippine Literature, *Toward a People's Literature* (1984) which contains, among others, a reevaluation of such writers as Nick Joaquin and Francisco Arcellana.

In Isagani Cruz's *Beyond Futility* (1984), little reference is made to primary texts, the domain of literary analysis. Instead, in this slight volume, Cruz directly confronts the problem of literary criticism in general, and provides assessment of selected Filipino and American critics working on Philippine texts. Although quite uneven in its general treatment of critics in the country, this volume should prove to be an interesting addition to the body of critical texts.

There have been other books published within the last fifteen years, but those enumerated here are representative works which scrutinize Philippine materials from certain critical perspectives. It appears that for these critics, Philippine literature, in any language, should be the primary concern of any critical enterprise. But it is also quite obvious that more emphasis is being placed on texts in the vernacular, even as various critics have realized that works in English constitute a minority in the corpus of Philippine writing. What concerns our scholars and critics, as will be shown in the following section, are issues 'dealing with conceptual frameworks, functions of criticism, the tools and strategies for clarifying the texts' meaning, and the role of literature in a wider system of interlocking institutions.

LITERARY THEORY

Until recently, literary studies chose not to concern themselves with literary theory. Critics proceeded to analyze various texts without making explicit their underlying assumptions. In one essay, Isagani Cruz says that he finds three theoretical positions that have been developed by Filipino thinkers.⁴ Cruz also admits that literary theory does not attract enough attention. This neglect has contributed to the proliferation of an assortment of ideas regarding literature, pronouncements which carry no definite authority, taken-for-granted presuppositions which are passed off as eternal verities. Depending on the current vogue or dominant school of thought, literature is made to assume a number of functions which can easily lead to the loss of its uniqueness as an artifact. In a large number of works, distinctions between literature and life are glossed over, for in the popular view, literature exists to promote beliefs, ideals and values.

Whether celebrating literature's didactic functions or stressing the aesthetic components of literature, the majority of critics in the past did not see the need to abstract from the data and theorize on any issue related to the practice of literature. An exception was Salvador P. Lopez who, in his *Literature and Society* (1940), argued the need for committed literature. It was

4. Isagani R. Cruz, "The Spare-Time Scholar: *Literaturwissenschaft* in the Philippines," in *Beyond Futility* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984), pp. 27-28. Cruz identifies these positions with Salvador Lopez, Albert Casuga and Geminio Abad.

also during this period that writers and critics were polarized into two movements represented on the one hand by Salvador Lopez, and on the other by the poet Jose Garcia Villa. Various called *traditions, movements, schools*, this perceived opposition between two types of texts would capture the imagination of subsequent generations of critics who held on to this polarization as a means of explaining Philippine literature in English.

As late as the sixties, no substantial discussion of literary theory had taken place. Writers and critics were content to follow certain models derived from their readings. Alejandro G. Abadilla, the acknowledged pioneer of modernist poetry in Tagalog, espoused a theory which was actually an amalgamation of ideas drawn from D.H. Lawrence, Walt Whitman, and E.E. Cummings. Most of the critics in the fifties and sixties, on the other hand, were indebted to Formalist and Realist canons which meant explicit preference for *verisimilitude, ironic detachment, subtlety*, and other concepts that formed the critical apparatus of Ricaredo Demetillo, Leonard Casper, and other critics.

Within the last ten years or so an increasing number of Filipino critics have ventured into literary theory. The range and interest of these critics vary, their influences are eclectic. Nonetheless, their texts constitute a welcome addition to current literary studies insofar as such works do attempt to provide theoretical frameworks for a better understanding of literary materials. The majority of these works are not exclusively devoted to theory. In fact, they are primarily books of essays analyzing a number of selections. In a few cases, what is discussed is the history of a particular genre. Serving as a common denominator is the writers' effort to explain the critical assumptions that govern their analysis of the texts. Generally speaking, the writers seem to have relied heavily on certain concepts and categories that first evolved and were later deployed in studying Western literature.

Four representative attempts at theorizing appeared in the last decade or so; all of them deal with texts in English. One of these attempts is Ophelia Dimalanta's *Philippine Poetics*, which begins and ends by discussing certain assumptions of the critic. In between her Introduction and Conclusion, she proceeds to examine the works of a number of poets writing in English.

In her Introduction, Dimalanta writes:

Without necessarily being a rigid formalist or an art for art's sake exponent, we feel bound to make a survey of the contemporary trends in poetry by focusing on form, aware of the fact that *pre-occupation with technique is a dominant feature of the better poems of the past two decades.*⁵

Elsewhere, Dimalanta claims that poetry's function is to arouse certain feelings in the reader; hence, literary value is measured according "to the vividness and breadth of the perceptual experience initiated in the reader."⁶ In the same breath, she posits that a good poem is one that provides the reader with valuable experience of which there are many kinds and degrees. Toward the end of her Introduction, she states that the predominant mode of analysis is formalistic, and not moral, psychological, or social. The conclusion restates the main points discussed in the Introduction.

A cursory look at the Introduction and Conclusion of *The Philippine Poetics* would show that the term formalism has been used rather loosely to refer to the critic's avowed interest in the form, not the matter of poetry. But it is also quite evident that Dimalanta has appropriated ideas touching on nonformalist concerns; the reader's response to the poem is, in the formalist lexicon, a kind of fallacy and is not to be a gauge for a better understanding of the poem. The lack of clarity in the critic's formulation of her assumptions and criteria manifests itself in the individual analysis of her chosen poems.

Gemino Abad's two volumes of criticism *cum* anthology of his own poems provide and substantially explore the components of a poetic theory. *In Another Light: Poems and Essays* (1976) and *A Formal Approach to Lyric Poetry* (1978) differ from other texts in the sense that the critic systematically explains and eventually employs certain categories and concepts derived from the works of R.S. Crane and Elder Olson, proponents of the Neo-Aristotelian School of criticism. In "Basic Modes of Criticism," Abad rejects the notion that he is setting up a theory of poetry:

5. Ophelia Dimalanta, *The Philippine Poetics* (Manila: Colegio de San Juan de Letran, 1976), p. 5. Underscoring supplied.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

It is not my intention to construct a theory of the lyric poem . . . My chief aim is to show the value and usefulness in practical criticism *and for certain critical purposes only*, of that critical method for the analysis of individual lyric poems which derives ultimately from Aristotle's Poetics.⁷

But in his essays, Abad does not fail to set up the framework through which he means to analyze the text. In the process, his exegesis exhibits some rigor mainly because it is made to follow a particular perspective. His analysis of "The Groundhog," for example, explains by classifying the whole process of poetic production in terms of the object of imitation, the manner of imitation, and the means of imitation which Abad shows are what make a poem a lyric poem.

In both Dimalanta and Abad, criticism is focused mainly on the text, and secondarily on the possible effect the text has on a reader. The uniqueness of the text as a self-contained artifact is thus affirmed in this view. The same ahistorical orientation is shown in Alfeo Nudas' *Telic Contemplation* which approaches the stories of seven Filipino writers in terms of their consciousness as artists. Nudas acknowledges his debt to such thinkers as Bernard Lonergan, Jacques Maritain, and the so-called critics of consciousness. The complex network of their ideas forms the basis of Nudas' discussion of Telic contemplation, first as a concept, and then as a method that alerts the reader's mind to the dynamic interaction of various components of the texts that the writer's consciousness has created.

Where Nudas limits his work to writing in English, Resil Mojares covers a much wider area—the novel in English, Cebuano and Tagalog studied diachronically or in time, and the various modifications the genre underwent in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Although conceived primarily as a literary history, Mojares' *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* offers certain provocative theses which any study on the novel should consider. In this book, the novel is shown to be polygenesis, exhibiting a syncretic form, and transformed by its interaction with concrete historical moments.

Other books published during this period approach the texts from an avowedly historical position, not exclusively in terms of

7. Gemino Abad, *In Another Light* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1976), p. 84.

the texts' formal qualities or structure. In this view, literature is examined as the product of the complex interplay between the writer and concrete historical moments. In the process, literature is brought back into history. Of these books, Lucila Hosillos' *Originality as Vengeance in Philippine Literature* is the most self-consciously theoretical. Where the other writers seem quite content doing textual analysis after a brief discussion of a chosen framework, Hosillos spends more than one-third of her work explaining her theoretical framework. In four chapters, the critic raises and attempts to answer certain questions regarding the study of Philippine Literature. Although upholding the text's primacy, Hosillos nonetheless insists that the critic must study how historical forces, economic structures and institutions have entered the work's artistic configurations. Hosillos says:

Thus, attempts to understand a literary work in its totality and significance entail knowledge of the external elements that cause the literary work into being [sic], its sources and origins, the writer's life, his inspiration and intent in creating the work, his milieu and environment.⁸

The aesthetic-historical approach, Hosillos further qualifies, requires a methodology called concentric comparaticism, imaged in terms of a concentric sphere. This image is explained as a continuum composed of the author continuum, tradition continuum, language continuum, national continuum and regional continuum. All these factors must be considered in any attempt to understand the literary text.

Another critic espousing a kind of historical approach is Virgilio Almario, who in his *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo* proceeds to interpret the clashes among sociopolitical forces and aesthetic factors in his attempt to analyze the development of twentieth century Tagalog poetry. In this lengthy study, Almario has sought to explain the dissonance and disharmonies that structured the development of Tagalog poetry by using a paradigm rooted in Balagtasismo and Modernismo as the main impulses of Tagalog poetry. His approach is clearly historical even as he shows how deeply rooted poetry has been in the different poets' own confrontations with various historical forces such as those related to our colonial experience.

8. Lucila Hosillos, *Originality as Vengeance in Philippine Literature* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984), p. 14.

Philippine history as the history of a colonized people and its possible effects upon the literature of the different periods in our literary history is the controlling concept in Bienvenido and Cynthia Lumbera's *Philippine Literature*. But Lumbera's more theoretical pronouncements may be seen in his *Revaluations*, where in a key article, Lumbera argues the need to develop a new orientation in order to understand Philippine Literature better. He points out:

Such a comprehensive view reveals that the high points of Philippine Literature are represented by works resulting from the struggle of the people to assert their native culture against a culture of the colonizing power.⁹

Lumbera has formulated a nationalistic literary tradition which he traces back to the stirrings of a new consciousness in the nineteenth century, and which has subsequently manifested itself at crucial moments in the nation's history.

In two studies, Nicanor Tiongson focuses on two popular dramatic forms—the *komedya* and the *sinakulo*. Tiongson's *Kasaysayan at Estetika ng Sinakulo at Iba Pang Dulang Panrelihiyon sa Malolos* (1975) offers an interesting account of various religious dramas in Malolos and presents an interpretation of the data included in the study. Tiongson theorizes and in the process establishes a correspondence between the dramatic forms and the socioeconomic factors obtaining at a given historical period. Thus Tiongson argues that these forms are the results of complex historical forces, colonization being the primary force. Using the canons of critical realism, Tiongson sees the *sinakulo* as a means through which the people were able to escape the harsh realities of their lives. The *sinakulo* never went beyond presentation to that level where art could be utilized to expose the people's conditions of exploitation. His *Komedya sa Parañaque*, on the other hand, chooses to study the development of the *komedya* in specific form, and generally follows the same work of analysis used in the earlier work.

Of these historical-minded critics/theorists, Epifanio San Juan, Jr. seems to be the most prolific. In a number of studies, San Juan analyzes key "realist" texts in terms of their own ideological

9. Bienvenido Lumbera, "Towards a Revised History of Philippine Literature," *Revaluation* (Manila: Index, 1984), p. 5.

struggle against what he calls "bourgeois liberalism." In an early work, he tended to view the literary text as quite simplistically "a product of a weapon in the class struggle."¹⁰ His objective, which is to portray objective reality, should determine the formal devices he will use. San Juan adds:

The dominant concern of the revolutionary artist may be described as the cognition and creative rendering of the entire process of life as the totality of sensuously concrete forces, as the perpetual ever-higher reproduction of underlying contradictions in history.¹¹

In his more recent work, *Toward a People's Literature*, San Juan appears to have modified his earlier position which now allows him to approach texts not solely as an instrument for the class struggle. Drawing on concepts and categories from Structuralism and Poststructuralism (especially the studies on language), Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian theories, San Juan has come out with essays which attempt to examine primary materials from a variety of perspectives. Nevertheless, as the critic reminds his audience, he has not turned his back on Marxist analysis as a crucial mode for understanding literary texts.

The need to theorize for the purpose of understanding Philippine literature is now an acceptable condition. Apart from the above-mentioned texts, a few other studies have appeared recently, each of them espousing certain beliefs regarding the nature of a critical enterprise, and each one viewing the object of study from a particular perspective.

Virgilio Almario's *Taludtod at Talinghaga* (1985), the most recent study of Tagalog poetry, focuses its attention on two concepts—*taludtod* (verse) and *talinghaga*—and studies the various ways in which these intrinsic qualities of traditional poetry have managed to surface again and again in history in the different poems that Tagalog poets have produced. This work's value lies in its systematic analysis of the ways in which these concepts have been appropriated by different writers belonging to diverse periods. Gemino Abad's *The Space Between* (1985) also deals with poetry but does so from a different perspective. In a series of essays in the second half of the book (the first half being Abad's poems),

10. Epifanio San Juan, Jr., *The Radical Tradition in Philippine Literature* (Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Co., 1971), p. 5.

11. *Ibid.*

Abad offers a number of ideas which have been largely influenced by the more contemporary thinkers and theorists in the West, each of whom has challenged certain fundamental assumptions not only regarding literature but concepts revolving around language (Ferdinand de Saussure), ideology (Louis Althusser) and Western logocentrism (Jacques Derrida). The third book is Resil Mojares' *Theatre in Society/Society in Theatre* which, by using a multi-disciplinary perspective, attempts to shed light on the complex interrelationship between a specific dramatic form—the *linambay* (Cebuano *komedya*) and the social and economic forces that could have influenced the growth and decline of the dramatic form. In this study, Mojares uses categories and methods drawn from literary criticism, history and anthropology in order to give a holistic view of a particular tradition and its rootedness in a given society.

Taken collectively, the books discussed in this section display the multiplicity of critical perspectives that have shaped the thinking of Philippine critics and theorists. That books of this nature are still being published suggests that our scholars have realized that literary theory is and should be treated as an ongoing enterprise until we have developed and refined our own corpus of theoretical works that have the greatest relevance to the needs of Philippine literature.

DIRECTIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

Based on the preceding discussions, it is possible to arrive at certain conclusions pertaining to the different critical projects that scholars/critics/theorists of Philippine literature have initiated.

Firstly, it is quite clear that a new breed of students of literature has emerged, formally trained to collate, analyze and interpret literary texts. Their activities are far-ranging, from bibliographic work to theoretical studies. Their commitment is to Philippine literature, in the different languages, and not to any other type of literature. The time has come when students of Philippine literature need not be defensive nor apologetic.

Secondly, the studies in the last fifteen years suggest a heterogeneity in their interests. Although works in English still attract a number of studies, those written in the vernacular have generated more interest and, in many cases, genuine enthusiasm. Litera-

ture in English is now viewed, quite correctly, as a minor stream in Philippine literature. In the study of vernacular and non-Christian literature, scholars have not limited themselves to the so-called "literate" forms or products of a literate society such as the novel, the short story or poetry influenced by modernist techniques. Preliterate forms (such as myths, epics, folktales, legends and early forms of drama) and popular or "low-brow" types such as the *komedya*, the *sinakulo*, the *bodabil*, the *balag-tasan* (poetic joust) and even the *kpmiks*, are now being studied more seriously. The ostensible objectives in these works might differ, but it is generally expected that each is meant to illumine a facet of this complex construct, literature.

Thirdly, recent developments, especially in criticism and theory, suggest a widening of the critics' horizons vis-a-vis the perspective through which texts are to be examined. The rather simplistic views shaping the earlier works (for example, the attribution of moral lessons to literary texts, the mechanical cause-effect relationship between literature and society, the view of literature as a sociological document, the dissolution of the text's literariness, among others) are giving way to more rigorous modes of analysis. This is not to say that contemporary studies do not show evidence of such pervasive methods, for in a large number of works, traces of such conventional modes are still present. However, it is also quite obvious that more care is being shown in order to allow the reader to view the material from a clear perspective. The studies done by Abad, Nudas and Mojares, to name a few, exhibit this concern for method.

Lastly, this particular period in literary studies has shown that critics and theorists alike have seen the need to use devices and strategies that in the past were considered nonliterary. It is argued that although the text is the object of study, a purely formal or textual analysis remains an incomplete project. Various critics, undoubtedly struck by the developments in Western criticism and theory, have also drawn categories from other disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, and semiotics in an attempt to come up with a complete study of the texts. Thus, concepts associated with Structuralism, Poststructuralism, semiotics, Neo-Marxism, to name a few, have cropped up with increasing regularity in a number of recent studies. In this view, the limitations of textual analysis are recognized for which

reason an interdisciplinary approach appears as a far more attractive, although more difficult, method.

These developments indicate the kind of activities Philippine critics engage in but the discussion, by itself, does not deal directly with the basic changes in the critical orientation of our critics and scholars. Nor does it deal with the reasons for the series of changes that has shaped literary studies today. What the following discussion hopes to achieve is rather limited—to clarify what formalism and Marxism contributed to literary studies and what other approaches might shed light on Philippine literature.

In retrospect, it is easy to understand why formalism as a mode of analysis and as a source of norms triumphed in the sixties. As a set of concepts, formalism was a powerful programmatic capable of clarifying certain issues in literary analysis. Moreover, as practised by the likes of Cleanth Brooks and William Wimsatt, for example, formalist analysis exhibited an intellectual rigor that the other approaches could not approximate. Furthermore, in the context of Philippine literature, texts written in English were considered, at least in the fifties and sixties, the most significant body of works, especially by those teaching in universities who also dabbled in creative writing and criticism. Because of their own exposure to formalism as a mode of analysis, it was almost inevitable that they would turn to English texts which had been largely steeped in modernist conventions. Vernacular texts, on the other hand, which had been shaped by more traditional codes, did not generally lend themselves to formalist analysis. Once standards canonized in formalist criticism were employed to study non-English texts, the results were bound to be disastrous; non-English texts resisted norms rooted in irony, tension, paradox, or wit. Critics who opted to work on texts in the vernacular made categorical statements damning the texts' sentimentality, didacticism and ornate language.

Formalism thus became a canonized perspective through which relationships between text and reality (nonexistent), text and writer (international fallacy), text and audience (affective fallacy) were accepted uncritically. The writer, so goes the argument, is a God-like individual who creates a self-contained world divorced from history, milieu and consciousness. The result is a notion of criticism that perceives itself as solely devoted to the unraveling of the text's complex design and structure. To those

who were used to pseudoanalysis that analyzed everything but the work itself, formalism was a new and refreshing mode. With this method, only the text mattered and excursions into history, biography were peripheral concerns. Among Filipino critics, the early Gemino Abad, Ophelia Dimalanta, Alfeo Nudas, and the early Virgilio Almario were situated in this mainstream. Although their approaches varied, they shared a common denominator—the view of literature as an artifact that pointed only to itself and not to any reality outside itself.

With the historical developments in the late sixties and early seventies, the formalist orientation of these critics came increasingly under fire from another group of critics. A kind of polarization had taken place with the terms of the debate remaining undefined in an explicit way. This emerging group of critics came from different universities, dealt with various genres, absorbed diverse literary influences, but shared a common view of literature as invariably shaped or determined by historical forces. These critics emerged on the literary scene at a time of deepening concern regarding the directions that literature ought to follow, not seen independently, but perceived as an institution in society. This society, in the late sixties and early seventies, was seen as undergoing turmoil at various levels—political, economic, social, cultural. In their view, uncommitted literature such as that written by Jose Garcia Villa and for a time, the writing of Nick Joaquin, was irrelevant. More importantly, they tried to argue that Philippine literature in English should not be made to occupy center stage, for it explored mostly middle-class conflicts, and not experiences undergone by the masses. It was not surprising that these critics trained their sight on and much of their rhetoric at critics with formalist orientation.

An important assumption in the works of Epifanio San Juan, Jr., Bienvenido Lumbera, Nicanor Tiongson, among others, is the close connection between aesthetics and politics, between the individual text and historical forces. No literary work can ever escape from its own historical moment for it is, like any other object, a product of particular labor. A text is never free from influences, nor is any writer a transcendent creator creating his artifact in an ivory tower. These critics did not limit themselves to mere description and eventual analysis. They gave out norms, explicitly stating that a work's relevance derived from its ability

to mirror conflicting historical forces. Moreover, literature is seen as a tool for waging the struggle of the proletariat against the enemy class. Literature is meant to open the people's eyes to the reality of their conditions. In this early phase of Marxist analysis, one major influence was Mao-tse-Tung's *Talks at the Yenan Forum* and its central concept of revolutionary realism.

In recent years, this critical approach has appropriated certain insights culled from other Marxist thinkers such as George Lukacs, Lucien Goldmann, and presently the writings of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci and in the case of Epifanio San Juan, Jr., from such diverse sources as the French poststructuralists and contemporary linguists. In less than two decades, this school of thought has consistently engaged the formalist and has argued that the Formalist approach is a severely limited one. In the process, Marxist analysis has made more readers cognizant of the need to widen the traditional scope of literary analysis, from text to context and a consequent systematic oscillation between these two fields.

Despite the startling differences between the two approaches, a number of similarities do exist. Firstly, both ahistorical and historical critics have made an analytical tool, a particular method, the means to pass judgment on the works being examined, but without making explicit the norms for judgment. In formalist readings, Manuel Arguilla's later stories and Amado V. Hernandez's poems would be faulted for being too heavy on content but weak as formal structures. On the other hand, Jose Garcia Villa's obsessive interest in his own being made explicit in compelling images would be looked at as pure narcissistic drivel because it is rooted in an individual's private musings. A necessary consequence of this view is the artificial dichotomy between form and content, as if any text could be fully grasped as a sundered work. This simplification has led a large number of historical critics to denigrate works that exhibit perfection of form and/or preoccupation with a soul's private anguish. On the other hand, formalist critics tend to look down on texts that explore societal realities as propaganda.

Secondly, both schools have shown their acceptance of realism as the dominant, if not canonized, mode. This means that both formal and Marxist analyses have placed an inordinately high value on works that capture/reflect reality out there. The more

life-like the characters and situations are in a text, the more verisimilitude it has, and therefore the better it becomes. One basic assumption in this view is the belief that literature has the power to recreate reality in its complexity. The problem of mediation is hardly taken up as a crucial issue that can cast doubt on the validity of that pervasive view.

A third similarity that flows from the canonization of realism, whatever its kind may be, is the negative attitude towards modes other than realism. This means, for example, the perpetuation of the myth that nonliterary works, or popular literature, are by nature inferior to works produced within the realistic mode. Popular literature, so goes the argument, is romantic, predictable, conventional reproductions which offer nothing but mindless entertainment to the gullible public. Although studies have been made on a number of popular forms, the dominant view suggests a failure to explore these cultural artifacts on their own terms, as articulations of certain world-views of a group of people. Formal analysis has not been done on such texts; Marxist criticism tends to look at these texts as instruments of escape and hence tools of the establishment to perpetuate the people's condition of ignorance and uncritical acceptance of the powerful elite's ideology.

Fourthly, in both approaches, the reader has been banished as a possible producer of meaning. Formalism generally looks at the reader's reaction with suspicion. On the other hand, historical criticism sees the need for literature to awaken the public conditioned to submit to the dictates of authority figures. So far, there has not been any sustained attempt to study the role of the reader in generating the text's meaning. This area is worth exploring in order to clarify the role of the reader, especially those responding to popular literature, in creating the text's meaning.

Lastly, both formalism and Marxism treat the text as a finished product, and not as a dynamic process. The object of study is therefore the text viewed as a completed work, and not as a text with a number of meanings generated under different circumstances, in different periods, by various readers. Moreover, the text is seen as having its meanings lodged within itself, permanent and unchanging. Criticism, in this view, is perceived as dependent on the text, assigned the task of unravelling the text's meaning. The reader's consciousness as a crucial factor in the production of

meaning is thus seldom considered. The critic studying the text, on the other hand, is expected to unearth what the text originally meant.

In retrospect, Philippine criticism and theory have made some strides within the last fifteen years. Although a number of things have been achieved, there is still a lot to be done. Formalism and Marxism have proven themselves powerful programs when used by the most significant critics working today. It appears, however, that there are other approaches and theoretical perspectives that our critics might find useful, for they deal with areas which conventional Formalist and Marxist analysis cannot explore adequately. For example, structuralist analysis can determine the different steps through which meaning is made possible; the text as a process rather than a product becomes in this view the main object of knowledge. Further, the ways different readers respond to given texts can better be gauged through the use of methods introduced and elaborated in reception theories.

Other areas need to be studied by critics and students of Philippine literature. Recent developments suggest the openness with which a number of critics have reacted to other approaches. Resil Mojares, Epifanio San Juan, Jr., Isagani Cruz, to name a few, have tried to use categories from these modes of analysis. This is not to say that the response has been uncritical. In general, critics have realized that they have to be selective in appropriating various categories from the West. The important factor is the use of these critical tools in order to make more comprehensible the different ways in which our writers have constructed their reality, and the varied methods resorted to by our writers in order to render intelligible the ways in which these realities have been constructed in literature.