

## BOOK REVIEW

# Reading the Regions 2: Philippine Folk and Oral Traditions (NCCA 2021)<sup>1</sup>

Priscilla Supnet-Macansantos

*Folklore, with its tangible and intangible elements... serves as the foundation of a people's early civilization... [It]includes a broad variety of creative production ranging from the people's oral literature ... their songs, music, and dance; their arts and crafts... architecture... fiestas, festivals, customs; their rites and rituals, drama, and theater..., their science and technology, and their beliefs; in sum, folklore... [includes] the entire compass of a people's knowledge and belief system... These issue from their collective efforts that form a complex network of varied constituents underlying, materially and spiritually, the foundation of their overall social consciousness.<sup>2</sup>*

One must commend the contributors and organizers for this collection of essays and papers on folklore, coming out as it did during the height of the Covid 19 pandemic. In the words of the late premier folklorist Vivencio Jose, *folklore* casts a wide net as it refers to the lifeways of a people. As the editor explains in the introduction to the collection, the essays included in the book *Reading the Regions 2* (RTR2) were presented in an online conference organized by NCCA's Committee on Literary Arts, to celebrate National Arts Month in 2021. Writers and scholars responded to the call for papers on folklore in its various facets, with a trove of material that included scholarly pieces, as well as guides for teaching folklore in the classroom.

The anthology is a rich harvest of material, one that would serve as a useful reference for scholars of various stripes, and teachers of folklore and folk literature. More importantly, the book again brings to the fore "the necessary and vital role of regional, folk, and popular

literatures as a constituent of the national literature.”<sup>3</sup> For readers seeking to establish firmer grounding on (1) issues regarding folklore, its role and value in the writing of literature; and (2) folklore studies, including the teaching of Philippine indigenous literature, the following writers with their papers, among others, are instructive:

Resil Mojares, “Revisiting Philippine Folklore”

Vivencio Jose, “Building an Anchorage for an Emerging National Order: Jose Rizal’s Works on Folklore”

Rogelio Sicat, “Folklore sa Nobela: Mga Tala ng Isang Manunulat”

Joyce Arriola, “Teaching Philippine Indigenous Literatures and Related Cultural Categories as Memory Texts”

Jesus ES Villafuerte, “Some Notes on the Oral Tradition and the Novel”

Equally absorbing are studies by anthropologists Myfel Paluga and Andrea Ragrario on epic chanting and the figure of Pantaron Manobo “breath” (goynawa); and an excerpt by Norma Lua in her PhD dissertation on Kankanaey (Kankana-ey/ Kankanay/Kankanai) fiction. Allan Derain’s “May Tiktik sa Bubong” discusses the myth of the aswang (and the tiktik) – creatures of Philippine mythology that have various manifestations in many regions, including “sonic environment” and “soundscape” arising with the supernatural or imagined phenomenon, and replicating the sounds of the natural environment. The myth of the aswang, prevalent in many regions, has been the subject of treatises, e.g., Maximo Ramos’ *Creatures of Philippine Lower Mythology*. Such a myth has been adapted in recent work by younger writers, a welcome development in contemporary Philippine literature. Alvin Yapan’s “Ang Pag-uulit sa Katutubong Panitikan” fits well with Paluga and Ragrario’s research on epic chanting, as well as with Derain’s essay on the tiktik and the aswang. These papers wrap around the essential feature of orality and sound in folk literature and its performances.

There are other papers, many, with a retelling and/or reading of stories and folk tales; and some, with helpful study guides for teachers. There is little, if any, that one can say to critique RTR2. If one were to reprise this publication, it may help the interested reader were the essays put in some order: those of interest to the teacher, perhaps put together in one section; those that interest the researcher, in a separate section. But that does not detract from the value of the collection in its present form.

Interest in folklore and folk literature is alive and has engaged researchers, writers, and other academics, despite the usual challenges of insufficient resources to conduct the work. RTR2 bears witness to this. Nonetheless, there is much more to be done. National Artist Resil Mojares' words are compelling, if not cautionary:

*...a large mass of vernacular texts is now available but remains mostly unstudied, and there appears to be a lack of clarity and consensus on the most productive approaches to the study of popular and vernacular texts...*

*In part, this has to do with the tendency for ideas and claims of representation and inclusion to be routinized and reduced to a form of tokenism and "affirmative action..."*

*I am not saying that the production of new data, by itself, is unimportant, nor do I deny the clear value of local studies for the needs of local constituencies. This, however, leaves mostly unanswered how local studies have measured up to the high promise that such studies will lead to significant revisions in how the nation is itself imagined.<sup>4</sup>*

Clearly, there are challenges and much work ahead for the writer, the researcher, and the advocate. RTR2 is a good place to start.

## End Notes

1. Sicat-Cleto, L. (Ed.) (2021). Reading the Regions 2: Philippine Folk and Oral Traditions. National Commission for Culture and the Arts.
2. Jose, V. R. (2021). Building an anchorage for an emerging national order: Jose Rizal's works on folklore. In Sicat-Cleto, L. (Ed.) (2021). Reading the Regions 2: Philippine Folk and Oral Traditions. National Commission for Culture and the Arts. P. 17.
3. Mojares, R. B. (2021). Revisiting Philippine folklore. In Sicat-Cleto, L. (Ed.). Reading the Regions 2: Philippine Folk and Oral Traditions. National Commission for Culture and the Arts. P. 5.
4. Mojares. P. 6.