

Introduction

This issue of the *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature*, actually just the second one, is wholly devoted to studies of folk and popular literary forms. We are not really breaking new ground here. We are just acknowledging a relatively recent trend in Philippine literary studies which appears to be gaining rather than losing momentum.

Aristotelian poetics, which systematized in the fifth century the metalanguage of Euro-centric literary criticism that still holds sway even now, unfortunately under-valued what Northrop Frye in 1957 was to call an "ecstatic" concept of literature which makes the strange, the painful and the horrible pleasurable by framing them within the self-absorbed individual's quest for romance and adventure, rather than within a guilt-ridden society's quest for a scapegoat, a sacrificial victim.

In hindsight, of course, it is clear that the undervaluation of the "feminine" concept of literature (and its "disruptive" effects on male-controlled social programs of primitive and not-so-primitive accumulation) had less to do with sexuality than with the imperatives of politics and economics. Aristotle — despite the "probative" value of his essay's aristocratic condescension towards slaves and women — was not the culprit; the political-economic canon (which he merely codified) was.

The naturalization by the patriarchal-capitalist order of lopsided gender relations to prop up an inhumanly efficient division of social labor, in any case, pushed aside folk and popular literatures to the apocryphal margins of society as being fit only for women and "half-men" — children, the poor, the ignorant.

Isabel Mooney surveys the damage wrought by this strategic "sprung rhythm" (of what eventually crystallized as the ethos of bourgeois domination and exploitation) on the tale and romance fiction. This is one situation where the exhortative cliché — Read and weep — applies.

It is perhaps proper to digress here a bit and comment on the current feminist project of reinventing the fairy tale and romance fiction forms. Feminists too often choose to ignore that this project was anticipated by a French writer (who was, of course, as rabid a rationalist and a methodical madman as any French intellectual one can think of): Marquis de Sade. The marquis invented the "anti-forms" of the tale and the romance with, uh, mixed results, as we all very well know. This is perhaps the context of Forrest Gump's mangling (à la Harold Bloom's "strong poets") of his mom's delicious metaphor of life's unexpected ecstasies in a box of chocolates.

Adelaida Lucero's contribution for this issue focuses on Ananta Tur's leathery and shadowy characters in *Perburuan* (which is certainly far-removed from de Sade's leather what-nots). As Lucero makes it out, it is a perfect specimen of a postcolonial romance form pre-constraining novelistic conventions. The stylized characters walk heavily, slowly, because of the uncertain atmospheric pressure of the world they inhabit. And Ananta Tur's extraordinary gifts as a storyteller are here therefore stymied, as it were, by his brooding character's unnatural poses and gestures. But precisely because it is a morality tale, it draws power from residual Javanese social discourses — to which, unfortunately, we would have very little or no access as ordinary Filipino readers.

Magelende Flores' article on some anti-Japanese guerrilla songs illustrates how bricolagic creativity is mothered by a lack of originality, in contrast to Ananta Tur's *oeuvre*. The same creativity matrix, in our time, when intellectual property rights and the like have been institutionalized to protect the rights of the rich and powerful, has been proscribed by law. But the proscription has failed to stop the market from generating a thousand and one versions of popular ditties on Philippine primetime television, in varying degrees made interesting by their transgressiveness or simple obnoxiousness. (It is interesting to note here that this popular tradition is essentially an appropriation of American consumerist creativity. This says something, too, about American influence on Philippine Literature.)

Ruth Pison's article points to the natural affinities of popular culture as a study area of criticism, in the Philippine context, to historiography and political discourse. An identical conceptual framework could be productively applied to Erwin Castillo's *Firewalkers* and Jose Dalisay's *Killing Time in a Warm Place* — all Filipino writers, really, those writing in English especially, since their mythopoeic trajectory is often oblique and thus result in a prose texture that is fraught with the "thin fine rain" Francisco Arcellana has immortalized. (Interested students may well begin their task by expanding or even just annotating NVM Gonzalez's essay on the mythopoeic quality of Tagalog metrical romances.)

T. Ruanni Tupas' theoretical paper gives a bigger linguistic context to the Ati-atihan chant — "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!*" It is a very informative article which should spawn many more studies since its project is really to raise significant questions, the raising of which already constitutes a step forward in English language studies in the Philippines.

Earl Stanley Fronda, named after one of the best-known American writers of the "whodunit," raises even more questions in his article on postmodernism. Crossing over from his base discipline (Philosophy), Fronda does a magnificent deconstruction of the deconstructive method. This is the sort of study which, over time, should break new ground in literary theory. But before it could do that, Fronda needs to expand its database.

The last article, a last-minute addition, speaks for itself.

The articles in this issue really raise more questions than they answer. And we hope that two, maybe three, issues down the line, we can put out a similar issue with articles that do not only raise more pointed questions but answer them as well.

Angelito L. Santos