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Salimbibig, Philippine Vernacular Literature

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SALIMBIBIG. PHILIPPINE VERNACULAR LITERATURE. Edited by Joseph A. Galdon, S.J. Quezon City: The Council for Living Traditions, 1980. 279 pp.

If the importance of an anthology could be gauged by its utility to other anthologists as well, then *Salimbibig, Philippine Vernacular Literature*, edited by Joseph A. Galdon, S.J., is indeed useful. For one, the very recent 1984 book of Isagani Cruz and Soledad Reyes, *Ang Ating Panitikan*, distinctive for its distracting typographical errors on many pages of the book, relied greatly upon the present volume, which employed, I suppose, a professional proofreader. (Non-Ilocano surely, for how else could I explain Parlongon (p. 12) instead of Parbangon?)

Its publication sponsored by the Council for Living Traditions and ready for distribution in 1980, *Salimbibig's* release and eventual availability at the Ateneo University Press for various reasons, came only three years after, and this review in another two years' time! I would like to think that an anthology, perhaps like wine, sweetens as it ages.

As "a basic introduction to the study of Philippine vernacular literature" (p. 2), the present volume, comprising ten readable essays and a ten-year old introductory article by Leonard Casper (a reprint), sufficiently fulfills the needs of graduate students in literature, as well as undergraduates in some instances, who have wisely heeded the counsel of their major advisers to "explore something closer to homegrounds" as subject for research. Armed with this volume, the student, in one sitting, is provided basic survey knowledge of vernacular literatures from various regions of the country (from Batanes to Sulu), not unlike a smorgasbord feast.

But not quite.

For nowhere in this 279-page volume does one find anything on Ilocano vernacular literature, when in fact, the Iloko dialect is believed to have produced the greatest number of printed works in any Philippine tongue, next to Tagalog. An omission like this is a major one — this, despite the limitations set forth by the editor in his preface (p. 2). This is in no way a mere ethnocentric bias on my part, being an Ilocano myself, but a serious point that every anthologist of Philippine vernacular literature studies must consider in planning a similar volume in the near future.

Nonetheless, this does not at all make the volume less useful nor do I burden any future anthologist with unrealistic expectations of completeness of material, knowing fully well the problems attendant to an anthology. The volume, in itself, is "manna from heaven," a Philippine literature teacher will tell you, amid the dearth of materials/research in Philippine vernacular literatures.

Yet, to my mind, this is a fallacy that we have long regarded as fact. What Philippine vernacular scholarship needs is, alas and alack, a biblio-

grapher. Up until now, the study of vernacular literatures other than Tagalog (Leopoldo Yabes' work on Iloko literature (1936) is said to be the trailblazer in this regard), has not attained a conscious, unified, concerted effort and has thus remained mostly fragmented and sporadic in character. There have been attempts, true, to replicate in other vernacular literatures the range and breadth of Yabe's bibliography for Ilocano materials yet no one serious Filipino scholar has signified the least interest to do the herculean task of searching, collecting, compiling and indexing all vernacular literature studies, and possibly materials in one neat volume or more. In the Philippines, unlike in America and Europe, bibliographic research is indeed an unattractive undertaking and this is, we must admit, the misfortune of our students, teachers and researchers of Philippine literature. I am certain that many materials have been retrieved and possibly studied over the years, yet remain largely unknown to other scholars other than their authors because of the simple fact that a bibliographer of Philippine vernacular literary studies and materials has not appeared in our midst.

One more thing, *Salimbibig* as a title for the volume is a misnomer in that, as a supposedly catch-all Tagalog term, it fails to embody the spirit of the written tradition in Philippine literature, although these materials in fact comprise the other half of the volume. Obviously intended to focus on the oral tradition (i.e., *salin ng bibig*) of Philippine literature, the title, unfortunately, only speaks of half of the entire picture. Though not as catchy and as easy-to-remember, SALIMBIBIG at PANITIK could have been a more accurate title for the present volume.

Still and all, the editor and the contributing authors, all ten of them (R. Lorrin, F. Hornedo, N. Madale, P. Nelmidia, G. Rixhon, T. Erestain, T. Maceda, D. Fernandez, E. Manlapaz and S. Reyes), are to be commended for their serious, unfaltering interest in Philippine vernacular literature scholarship; for their *one*, passionate plea for more studies in this area; and for rediscovering for us, teachers and students of Filipino culture, the richness of our literary heritage as a people. Credit too must go to Romulo Corporal for his very apt, eye-catching cover design.

Finally, a volume like *Salimbibig* need not only serve "as a basic introduction for those who wish to accept the challenge" of retrieval and analysis of Philippine vernacular literary materials (p. 3); it should likewise be the trailblazer for other scholar-anthropologists who will continue the worthy task that the present editor has begun. It is in this latter regard, perhaps more than the former, that the present volume has tangibly succeeded beyond question.

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