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## **A Survey of Contemporary Bikol Writing A Bibliographical Note**

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## **A Survey of Contemporary Bikol Writing: A Bibliographical Note**

MARIA LILIA F. REALUBIT

Contemporary writing (1955-90) in the Bikol Region is concerned with the larger issues and problems that confront the Bikolanos and the search for an identity vis-a-vis and in harmony with the nation. But the backwardness of the Bikol Region and the polarity in the language situation create a lack of written material, especially imaginative writing, in the Bikol language. A large majority of the works are in English. About 5-8 percent are written in the native language and printed in the local weeklies as news reports, opinion columns or folk songs. A handful of isolated Bikol poets bravely carry on but do not see print. Of the works in English, historical and sociocultural, religious and journalistic writing predominate. Lately poetry in English has been enjoying a resurgence by writers who are university-based in Metropolitan Manila, but these are not available in rural Bikol.

### **HISTORICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL WRITING**

Historical studies look at Bikol society from inside with different historical approaches to the study of Bikol history. Domingo Abella's *Bikol Annals* treats history as a scientific record from primary sources in the archives of Spain. Abella wrote other short articles, among which are "The Bikols in Philippine History" and "General Vicente Lukban" Before his death he was working on the second volume of *Bikol Annals*. On the national level, he wrote provoking articles on the *indio*, the Filipino flag, education during the Spanish period, and Philippine-Southeast Asian relations.

Bikol's lone Zobel Awardee for 1968 was Alejo Arce who wrote *El Bicolano y su Ambiente* in Spanish. The book is a compendium of Bikol customs, beliefs, rites and talismans, superstition and evil spir-

its, magic and magicians, witches and witchery, including literature, folklore and burial practices. Many of these works, however, particularly the treatise on "Aglipayanismo in the Philippines," folk music and the Agta dances of Bikol, were destroyed by termites. Arce relied on fieldwork and participant observation for the most part and on library research to some extent. As public schools supervisor, he was able to gather primary data from barrio folk during school visitations.

James O'Brien, S.J. has devoted years of study to Bikol history and culture. He called the region a "kingdom of kindness" and thought of it as a region infused with spiritual unity. His book, *The Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Bicol* is a collection of Bikol cultural traditions. O'Brien is an American Jesuit who has made Bikol his adopted home. While teaching at the Ateneo de Naga for many years, he worked on the history of the region and produced a journal called *An Maogmang Lugar* (The Happy Place).

The tendency to see historical writing as moral commentary is obvious in Jose Calleja Reyes' short essays. In "The Bikol Malaise—A Perspective" he sees the malaise as "the green-eyed monster of envy and divisiveness." He bewails the lack of a leader: "Gone were the days when the true Bikol leader earned his spurs in fair combat in the political arena, in the tradition of Platonian and Aristotelian politics." In "The Lost Gold Culture of the Bicol" he laments the extinction of the flourishing gold culture in the Bikol peninsula after its pillage by the *conquistadores*. His forthcoming book is tentatively titled *Quest for Maharlika*.

Luis General, Jr. is a lawyer and writer. Most of his works appear in the local weeklies in Naga City. His work on "15 Bicol Martyrs" recalls the conflict that raged around the name "martyr." Three of these martyrs were priests—Gabriel Prieto, Severo Diaz and Innocencio Herrera—who championed the cause of Filipinization in the Bikol Region. Some of the fifteen were ilustrados, but branded as filibusteros and considered to be dangerous threats to Spanish rule. There were the Abellas—Manuel, Domingo, Ramon and Mariano—who were anti-Spanish and who refused to bow to them. The three priests, the Abellas, Tomas Prieto, Mariano Arana, Camilo Jacob, Florencio Lerma, Cornelio Mercado, Macario Valentin, Rafael Gutierrez and Francisco Valera were executed at the Luneta on 4 January 1897, five days after Rizal's execution.

In writing about the martyrs of Camarines Norte who rose up in arms against the Spanish provincial government, General draws information from secondary sources such as John N. Schumacher, *Revolutionary Clergy: The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement*

1850-1903 (1981) and Marcos Gomez, *A Friar's Account of the Philippine Revolution in Bicol* (1984). Using "Mga Sinarakit na Bicolnon" (The Suffering Bicol People, 1958) by Ignacio Meliton and Jacinto Ursua as a starting point, he makes an interesting analysis by comparing their work with Schumacher and Gomez. General's work is a restatement of what he believed were deceptions and inadequate evidence in other works on the Bicol martyrs.

Danilo M. Gerona wrote *From Epic to History: A Brief Introduction to Bicol History*. The author used materials in various archives and libraries, including the books and articles by Abella, Francisco Mallari, S.J., James O'Brien, S.J. and Ma. Lilia F. Realubit. The narrative account is highlighted by rare maps of the region showing the earliest parishes and the importance of the region in the maritime industry of the colonial government. Gerona is a college instructor of the Ateneo de Naga.

Francisco Mallari, S.J. has consulted the Spanish archives for the manuscripts on Bicol. His articles "The Remontados Of Isarog" (1983) and "Muslim Raids in Bicol, 1580-1792" (1986) are well documented. His collection of historical essays on Bicol is entitled *Ibalon Under Storm and Siege* (1990). Stephen Henry S. Totanes has written "Principales and Provincial Development During the American Period: Sorsogon, 1900-1941" (1990). He treats the principalia's role and reaction to the pacification policy of the Americans and their resistance to the revolutionary activities of the Sorsogon people and traces the growth and development and eventual decline of the abaca industry. Totanes is a faculty member of the Ateneo de Manila University.

Luis C. Dery wrote "From Ibalon to Sorsogon: Prehistory to 1905" (1986). Its main thrust is "to show the evolution of a people from an idyllic beginning to a somewhat confused colonial entity." Dery presents the history of Sorsogon as the result of the dynamic interaction of various forces such as geography, inhabitants and external forces which influenced the province and transformed the people. The grouping of details that make up the chapters is interesting: The Era of Ibalon, Ereccion de Pueblos, The Moro pressures, From Ibalon to Provincia and From Insurrecto to Bandido. Each of these chapters is amply provided with data and maps from archival materials. Dery emphasizes the fact that Sorsogon underwent internal change as a result of the formidable forces of colonialism and Moro pressures.

#### JOURNALISTIC WRITING

It is in the journalistic field that contemporary writing in Bicol is most active. Twenty-two local newspapers vie for the region's read-

ership. These four-to-eight page weeklies contain news items, opinion or gossip columns, judicial notices and advertisements. There are thirty-five columns, mostly in English, which indulge in partisan politics on the local, regional and national levels.

Outstanding among the better columnists are Luis General, Jr. and Nenita F. Peñones. General's column "Yesterday in Today" (*Balalong Newsweekly*) is serious, formal writing. He writes with conviction and integrity so his prose is clear, rational and adequate to his purpose. The historical pieces are informative and well written. Often he uses data from published materials and reinterprets or analyzes them in relation to presentday events and phenomena. He prefers the direct appeal in his commentaries and criticisms on local and national issues.

Whether in his columns or editorials for the *Bicol Star*, *Leader Vanguard* and *Vox Bicol*, Jose Fernando Obias writes with descriptive power and originality. Obias' prose is alive, concrete and lyrical. "In the name of peace, give NPA a chance," he suggests to the military, who suspect that the publication of an article entitled "The Revolution according to Conrado Balweg" is financed by the Communist Party. To enliven an old subject, the Virgin of Peñafrancia, he uses historical and classical allusions, referring to the goddess of fertility and fertility symbols in the coat of arms of the bishop under whose reign the church was constructed.

Nenita F. Peñones writes a column "Thinking Deeper" for the weekly paper *Handyong*. She discusses both local and national problems. Her monograph *Seeing Ourselves* is an insight into the behavior of the Bicol people. The book points out the strong and weak points of the people, and urges self-development and progress.

#### P O E T R Y

Students of Philippine poetry in English will remember Luis G. Dato whose poems graced the literary magazines of the University of the Philippines in the thirties. Dato wrote love poetry and philosophic poems as a young man, but in the seventies he wrote on religious themes. Dato's poems in Bikol are not as memorable nor as significant. For he writes mostly of local beauties who reigned as queens in town fiestas.

In the poems of Alfredo G. Parpan published in *The Rainbow*, thought and language merge into a new energy. "Polyphonic Pas-sional" reveals itself by a narrative progression. The poet, talks directly to God, who is unbelievably God because of the way he looks. But there are new things in the poem—the act of doubting itself and of telling God about it.

In "Madonna of the Palms" Parpan shows his artistic skill at joining idea and image and choice of words. Parpan, a native of Iriga City, is a Jesuit priest. He spent several years teaching at the Ateneo de Naga.

The note of wonder in the poetry of Jaime B. Espinas is pervading. The boyish delight and trust, and doubts and questions are transparent even in his saddest moments. His poems are memorable for experimentation.

Some of the more lyrical poems have been written by J. Antonio Carpio. His pieces are marked by surprising images and symbols interwoven with poetic charm. The poem "This Cross is Mine" asserts personal participation in the Sacrifice. It sounds like a call for responsibility in God's plan. Carpio has deftly specified the form because he fully understood its emotional power. The same is true with the Lenten poems, where he favors the open form in verse line. The fresh combination of traditional and free verse has direct symbolic penetration into the relationship between God and man. The poem "Reflection" which talks of violence achieves dignity through structure and verbal subtleties. The short poem "You Call This Treason" is almost perfect in rhythm and rhyme even though the author rebels against the custom of looking sad during Lent. The religious poems of Carpio are probing: Where was the Lord during that Easter morning? Where was the Blessed Mother on that day? In another poem, "When All Was New," he asks another question to produce a charming and simple poem about clay.

Merito B. Espinas writes love poems. His pieces have lacy rhythms and pauses. His themes are woven with hurt and pain and the celebration of nature. Espinas is a poet, Bikol studies expert and faculty member of the Bicol University. He has published numerous articles and monographs on Bikol history and culture. His anthology of Bikol literary works was printed several years back.

The latest poem of Celedonio G. Aguilar, "The Spat and Spice," is analytic. He sets a scene—usually emotional-laden or grotesque, and he is there as an observer or participant but is detached. The poem insinuates a quarrel and a reconciliation. Beneath the levelness and monotonic rhythm is a fire that he quells with words into quiet but surging energy. The earlier poems written in the seventies like "Bacong Beach" bring rich pictorial observation. "A Ferry Boat Ride" talks of the fear of being swallowed by the water. The cry to Jesus is not for help but reproach.

Carlos Ojeda Aureus' poem, "Voyage with a Modern Guru: Crossing the First River of Hell," talks about a guru who advocates withdrawal from the world to attain truth. Here suffering is essential in

finding the "right of way." It seems, though, that Aureus is describing the physical world but actually expressing himself. However, he sees life on a higher plane and perceives the design of the mosaic. The dedicatory poem "On Your Wedding (For Max and Vi)" reminds the reader of the Browning poems. Aureus teaches at the University of the Philippines. He also writes in Spanish.

Luis Cabalquinto's newest volume of forty-six poems is titled *The Dog-Eater And Other Poems*. From first to last we note a quality of intuitiveness and spirituality. Wherever he goes—Central Park or Tokyo or back to the Philippines—he becomes aware of "a new knowledge/ that makes the old truths untrue." The belief that cosmic forces are present in the natural world is even more evident in "Afternoon by the Seine." The transformation of the man who became a plant in "The Orchid" because he was tired of pursuing a life that is not in line with his true nature is typically transcendental. There is, in fact, a Bikol legend of change of a man or girl into a flower. The short poem "Design" is reminiscent of folk thinking that all things in nature move around each other. "Still-Life" says almost the same thing—that things "all seem to lie in wait/ for the more characteristic shift/in the meantime anchored, contented with how they are juxtaposed/ quiet in the act of drawing/ from and giving to one another." That the poet himself is constantly drawn to his country and hometown is felt in almost every piece. In "Eating Lechon With My Brothers and Sisters" in his own home, he is at peace and content. "The piss on the snow/ in a sidewalk in New York" reminds him of the strange man back home who ate dog's meat. The cover blurb sums up Cabalquinto's works as a poet:

From Magarao, in Bikol Land, to New York, and back again, and elsewhere along the way—these are 46 poems that cover a global territory. Proof enough that a good Filipino poet can survive beyond the water's edge. But even more comforting: poet in New York, after all these years, remains a Filipino yet.

Cabalquinto edits a poetry magazine in New York.

G.B. Calleja, a renowned scientist, is also a literary man. His latest book, *Time With All Its Wails* contains fifty-seven poems. He himself calls the book:

A very irreverent book. The saving grace: it is only slightly filthy. Moreover, the author (according to the author) shows signs, in the end, of having outgrown it. But not a trace of contribution from G.B.Calleja, who is paid (relatively poorly) to teach (also relatively poorly) at Diliman.

Indeed Calleja moves from profundity to profanity, from serious to light or vice-versa. He is not just impish but naughty. But there are gems in the book. The poem "from notebook one" is serious, though it begins with banter. Towards the end, he admits aloneness but is hopeful. The piece "now maybe if I keep on, etc." is beautiful in its realism, its simplicity. It talks of no more gutters where he strays, or of waste plains, but instead ". . . dream aloud/of one who leads me through the crowd." It is the one serious love poem in the collection. The poem "Severina" is one of the best. It is a son's tribute to a beloved mother but addressed to his sisters and brothers. It is characteristic of Calleja's realism and down-to-earthness. No sentimental lines, but every word is moving, gentle and controlled.

Marne L. Kilates, is a first prize Palanca winner in poetry. His poems are collected in *Children of the Snarl and Other Poems*. In his Preface to the book, Alfredo Navarro Salanga speaks of it as a "folk Gothic" that stirs up and "disturbs us because they open us up to ourselves . . ." The native Bikol would see the poems as pleasant reminders of the hometown—Tio Andoy, The Volcano in Daylight, Homecoming, etc. Kilates opens for the reader the old world of his hometown and finds the reminiscing delightful.

In the Bikol region poetry of sociopolitical content began to take shape in the mid-seventies. The pieces were written in Bikol, Tagalog and English depending on the facility of the poets. One outstanding poet is Wilfredo Gacosta from Sorsogon. Five of his poems express sentiment over childhood friends who no longer recognize him. The poem "Ang Mga Kaibigan" (Friends) vividly portrays his friends from the poor. The sentiment expressed in "Mga Alaala sa Unang Araw Bilang Kadre sa Nayong Tinubuan" (Memories of my First day as a Cadre in my Hometown) is bitter but controlled. His memories are those of his childhood friends who now act strangely to him. "Isang Madaling Araw" (Small Hours of Morning) differentiates between children's games of war and war in the real sense. War, he clarifies in the third stanza, ". . . di laro ang digmaan/binayaran ang mga kaaway/upang pumatay. (. . . war is not a game/ the enemy is paid to kill.)" On the death of Gogola, the cruel hacendero in "Bakit Ngumiti Lang Kayo" (Why Did You Just Smile?), Gacosta exhorts the people to laugh and not just smile. The fight against men of Gogola's kind is not a personal revenge; it is class struggle. The one that will laugh is the whole oppressed class. "Ang Kasaysayan ng Isang Panawagan" (The Story of a Call) narrates how the cadres act toward soldiers who suddenly come to invade their mountain hide-out.

A group of young poets writing in Bikol promises a new beginning for Bikol writing. Frank Peñones' craft is modern in treatment and



appears capable of a large and strong poetic structure. Two others, Myrna Prado and Connie Marcaida are traditional in style but aware of contemporary issues. "Sarungbangui" by Peñones is subtle and delicate in wording. The poem "Opon sa Ibalon: Pagchale can Mascara" (The Boar in Ibalon after being Unmasked ) is addressed to Cadungnung, the singer in the folk epic of the Bikols. The *opon* is the boar that destroyed the plants of the ancient people and left the countryside bare in hunger and poverty. Peñones' comparison of the boar that destroyed life and nature in the ancient times to modern society that does the same is clever and appropriate. The adversarial image is clear. People today are no longer interested in poetry but in wealth. The reference to the epic is significant. The *corrido* or the old stories, in this context, were popular reading materials. That society has shifted interest from the old writings, hence tradition, to bank notes or money, is what saddens the poet.

#### THE SHORT STORY

The first short stories in Bikol were written from folklore. The period from the thirties to the late fifties produced stories taken from simple, everyday life which were published in the *Bikolana* (Roces Publication) and *Bicolandia* magazines. Most were love stories, with only a few standing out for characterization and manner of presentation. Either the main character is a paragon of virtue, a simpleton, a clown, or a negative representation of the ideal. Devices like letters, barrio meetings, rumor or gossip are used for unfolding and developing the stories. Stories with social orientation uphold the idea of the masses as a source of power and progressive ideas. Characterization is consistent. The women are strong, while the men know what they want.

The largest number of stories were written by Ana T. Calixto. Her better works are "Mga Matang Tumtom sa Luha" (Eyes Full of Tears), "Pusong Ilo sa Pagkamot" (A Heart Orphaned of Love), "Salawahan" (Traitor) and "Maimon" (Jealous). These stories stand out in plot and manner of presentation. Her moralistic stories define the ideal man or woman positively.

Rogelio Basilio stands out as a writer of contemporary topics with social significance. His stories could have contributed to the development of Bikol fiction had he given them more than just a chronological sequence. His better works are "Anino" (Shadow), "Kayamanan (Wealth), "Mapait asin Matamis Bunga" (Bitter and Sweet Fruit) and "Ginutiran" (Overfed).

Other better story writers are O.N. Morato, Romeo Claro Nieva, Anastacio T. Angeles, Apolonio Buban and Valerio Zuñiga. The latter

has written stories adapted from folktales as well as long stories such as "An Langit nin Katiwasayan" (The Heaven of Peace) and "Mga Kalag na Nagkabaragbag" (Tormented Souls).

A good example of Bicol writing is "Sarong Banal, Duwang Altar" (One Saint, Two Altars) by Inday D. Romero. A widow and an old man meet in a boarding house, get acquainted, share drinks and finally go out together. It is not an unusual story, but the way it is written catches attention. Descriptive passages are dramatic in the use of simple but vivid words. Characterization is consistent: both the characters know what they want, and the climactic tension steadily rises. There are no religious or moral overtones. A fact of life is told and it is told well.

Among the English short story writers are Hermel Nuyda, Vicente Rivera, Jr., Kerima Polotan-Tuvera, Clemente Roxas, G. Burce Bunao, Gloria Garchitorena-Goloy, Delfin Fresnoza, and Jose T. Flores, Jr. Bunao was on the staff of the *Philippine Collegian* and *Literary Apprentice*; Goloy served as editorial staff member of several national magazines. Tuvera and Uranza were Republic Heritage and Palanca awardees, respectively. Nuyda received a Philippines Free Press Award in 1955. Rivera was given the same in 1954. Flores was a fellow to the Iowa Writing Workshop. One Fresnoza story was included in *Philippine Cross-Section*.

Two writers have persisted in the story form—Socorro Federis Tate and Carlos Ojeda Aureus. Tate has written more than fifty short stories since the 1950s. These have been published in the *Philippines Free Press*, *Expressweek* and *Focus* magazines. Generally, Tate writes about ordinary people who do ordinary things. The narratives are uneventful, though she makes them vivid. Tate's characters do not struggle heroically. To have love, to be at peace with the self and family, to provide for small needs and small pleasures, and to believe in God's power and mercy—these are what the characters in her stories are happy about. It is her descriptive brilliance that shines. Tate handles plot with deft hands. Tate teaches at the Ateneo de Naga and at the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary.

Carlos Ojeda Aureus writes impressively. The story "The Latecomer, An Early Story" conjures a mood and moves head-on into a repellent situation. Aureus has a narrative gift even though the story is melodrama and the characters are uninteresting. In "Cathedral" the main character, Avelino Trinidad, is "queer, distanced and garrish." From a bookworm and seminarian, he is transformed into a lustful and ruthless man. The rape that he commits in the patio of the Cathedral is too shocking, too revolting. The girl's friends see the victim's plight and run towards Avelino upon whom they pounce, buffet with blows

and "dismember." It is unthinkable that girls should participate in the bloody encounter. Avelino is redeemed somehow in his vision of "... a young man standing majestically over the old city, and glancing skyward . . ." The policeman who wonders "why a thing like that could happen to a member of the Trinidad family" still believes in the nobility of man despite all else. Here a religious upbringing is tested against the sordid reality of the world outside a seminary. The influence of Nick Joaquin's stories is strong in Aureus. He can write with as much power given time.

#### D R A M A

Stage drama in the city of Naga was never the same after the heyday of the Cathedral Players of Ateneo de Naga in the fifties. Headed by Father James B. Reuter who saw tremendous dramatic potential in the students, English plays were translated into Bikol, fitted with Bikol stage practices and presented on Sundays at the town Plaza. The Cathedral players also went to the rural areas and played in church patios and town plazas. When the group folded, new writers began to appear from the more established schools in Naga City. The local talents were Wilfredo Alindogan, who wrote "Viva La Virgen," and Rudy Alano who wrote "Octavio" and "Pororopot." The folk epic "Ibalon" has inspired three dramas, all written in the early seventies. "Handiong" by Orfelina Tuy and Fe V. Ico was presented to capacity crowds. "Ibalon Operetta" by Jose Calleja Reyes was presented at the Little Theater of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. A third play "Iyan Kitang Bikol" (That's How We Bikols Are) was written by Victor Ramos. The first two plays follow the folk tale with additions in presentation and stylization. Both plays are musical dramas. The third play concentrates on the last two stanzas of the epic when the monster has been killed and Handiong is stupefied by the death. Thus, the play begins from the hero's lamentation and counsel to the people.

The biographical-historical play "Barlin" by Juan Ragragio is based on the true story of Jorge Barlin, the First Filipino Bishop of the Philippine Catholic Church. Another historical play based on the Bikol—American struggle under the leadership of General Ludovico Arejola in 1990 has just been written and will be produced by the Ateneo de Naga.

The colleges and universities are actively writing and presenting plays. Arts and cultural councils have been organized in every province under the stewardship of the Cultural Center. Everardo Napay, an architect by training and playwright by avocation has written two love plays, "Mga Burak sa Hardin nin Pagkamoot" (Flowers in the

Garden of Love) and "An Patintero" (The Tuba Seller). These plays were staged in Legaspi City.

#### SCHOLARLY WRITING

The latter part of the eighties has brought more active interest in Bikol scholarly writing. Five areas are receiving the most interest—literary, folklore, translations, archaeology and dictionary. *Bicols of the Philippines* (1983) by Maria Lilia F. Realubit gave impetus to Bikol studies, with a brief but comprehensive history of the Bikol Region and a historico-analytic study of Bikol literature. The book contains translations into English of Bikol poems not hitherto printed elsewhere. Writings in English and Spanish have also been included, together with a bibliography of Bikol works from ancient times to 1975.

Another translator par excellence is Teresita Erestrain, a professor of literature at De la Salle University. She handles Bikol short stories deftly. The Bikol folk epic "Ibalon" is the object of several studies. Ignacio Meliton was the first to explain the place-names and folk terminology in the epic and to have it translated into English. Other translations were done by Alejo Arce (1969), Luis Dato (1968), and Merito Espinas who did a study for the Far Eastern University *Faculty Journal* (1964-65). New translations of the epic have been written by Jose Calleja Reyes and Jose Fernando Obias. The Reyes work is in free verse, while the first which he did for *Philippine Studies* (1968) was in traditional verse. Reyes also wrote a retranslation of Fray Bernardino Melendreras' poems which number about a hundred. Reyes started on this project after research work in Spain. Of the translation of the epic into Bikol, three writers have attempted it—Reyes, Espinas and Zacarias Ll. Lorino.

The translation of the *New Testament* and the *Book of Psalms* into Bikol are the crowning works of Teotimo C. Pacis, late bishop of Albay. From the points of grammatical, lexical and contextual equivalence his translations are excellent. It is clear Pacis as poet greatly facilitates Pacis as translator of the psalms.

Bikol oral literature has also been the focus of study. Realubit began the folkloristic approach in her "A Sociolinguistic Study of Bicol Verbal Folklore." By the application of the sociolinguistic method, she analyzed riddles, proverbs, legends and myths as a mirror of the ideals, ways and thinking of the Bikol people. May Antoinette Segundo, presently a faculty member of the Bikol University, has applied the ethnographic approach in her study of Daraga folksongs. Cynthia Nolasco, of De La Salle University and Sorsogon, is using the ethnography of speaking method in her evaluation of Sorsogon folksongs.

Ermelo M. Almeda, who owns a collection of Bikol artifacts, writes on the archaeological finds in various Bikol sites. Presently he is concentrating on burial jars and stone burial jar covers. He writes of the burial jar practice in the Bikol region and the unique socioculture of the ancient potters of the region. Almeda attributes this to the religious belief not only of the Bikol but Filipinos as well, that is, "the belief in the soul that is indestructible."

Dominador Almeda, Jr., a medical doctor by profession and owner of rare books on Philippine history, has commissioned Leticia Caldera Sabino to translate from ancient Spanish to English the 1854 Bishop Francisco Gainza reprint of *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol* by Fray Marcos de Lisboa. The work is presently being evaluated by a committee composed of Bikol scholars chaired by Evelyn C. Soriano of the Ateneo de Manila University.

A new Bikol-English dictionary titled *Tambobong* (Storehouse) by Jaime Malanyaon was recently published. The dictionary focuses on contemporary vocabulary. Very evident are words from Spanish, which are plentiful in the Bikol language.

*The Nueva Caceres* is a biannual journal published by the University of Nueva Caceres in Naga City. Every issue carries the byline of two literary critics—Adelfa Conda and Lucio Teoxon, Jr., both faculty members of the university. The former concentrates on English authors and works, while the latter reviews Filipino works and writes on literature in general.

Teoxon's review of Bienvenido N. Santos' stories and poems is comprehensive. He regards the works of Santos as reflective of social change and reflective of the times. The use of native aesthetic concepts are appropriate and bear on the national struggle of our people. The story of Abelardo Abis also attracted Teoxon's critical observations.

Teresita Obusan, a prolific writer and specialist on Asian Studies, writes on the Filipino's innate religious belief. Her expositions of popular religion and its critical role in Philippine revolts is "a departure from the usual pattern of revolution." History of religion in the Philippines is tackled in a very scholarly manner, focusing on religious symbols and change together with the EDSA revolution.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary writing in the Bikol Region is still mostly done in English. The works, from history to literary criticism, are marked by a persistence of the past.

The Golden Period of Bikol Literature, from 1908 to 1940, may take a long time in coming to rebirth, considering the neglect of the Bikol

native language in the schools, media and society. Present writers appear to be reaching out to their cultural heritage in their search for the self.

Provincial Bikol living has not been dynamic enough to provide the Bikol writer with beneficial social, economic, political, intellectual, moral and aesthetic devices for his expression. The Bikol writers based in Metro Manila—Aureus, Calleja, Kilates and Cabalquinto—have enlarged their vistas and sensibilities through exposure to urban aesthetics and sociopolitical commitment. They have not forgotten their ancestry and are anchored in their native heritage. The poet, Celeonio G. Aguilar, lives in Albay but he has had training in a writing workshop in Silliman University, which provides him the incentive and confidence to keep on writing. The Espinas brothers, Jaime and Merito, Carpio, Parpan and Tate are attuned to the times and have things to say. But all these writers work in English. Until the seventies, only one young poet and a few young playwrights using Bikol as medium were writing on contemporary themes. Only the poet of "Opon sa Ibalon: Pagcahale can Mascara" (The Boar in Ibalon Unmasked) has been able to see a unity of the past and present. It is the young writers who are beginning to be aware of contemporary regional problems and national issues, and the young people who are using Bikol and Filipino in their writing. Given more linguistic space, they will be able to resurrect Bikol writing within the context of the Philippines.

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