

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Rebecca T. Añonuevo
Talinghaga ng Gana

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Philippine Studies vol. 52, no. 3 (2004): 427–428

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

BOOK REVIEWS

Rebecca T. Añonuevo, *Talinghaga ng Gana: Ang Banal sa mga Piling Tulang Tagalog ng Ika-20 Siglo*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2003. 257 pages.

The spiritual in poetry is always associated with the inward and the esoteric. This notion of the spiritual informs Rebecca Añonuevo's *Talinghaga ng Gana* and provides the necessary starting point in unraveling the ties that bind creative poetic tradition to the specific historical and personal contexts that determine why, how, and what spirit it is we experience in poetry.

At the very core of her investigation is the attempt to locate *gana*—the insatiable and indefinable soul—within an intricate web of symbols appearing in significant works from Tagalog poetry. She recalls experiences both the intimate and the communal to shed light not only on the object of inquiry but also on the different cultural features inscribed in local poetry that directly or indirectly traverse the path of *gana*. In rhythmic prose, Añonuevo unearths not the meaning of poems, but shows rather that poetry, or any work of art for that matter, will always escape the finest of illuminations.

As such, Añonuevo's examination is de facto provisional. She strives to concretize the very meaning of *gana* through a wide-ranging discussion that examines its mystical and enigmatic presence in poetry. Drawing from her own experiences as a writer, she infuses her criticism with

an awareness of the creative process. The study consciously and earnestly enriches the reading experience by not only mapping out literary talent and inspiration. More importantly, it interrogates history, popular perceptions, and the conditions upon which an understanding of poetry is possible.

Gana is elusive, and for the author it is this elusiveness which constitutes its range and power: as the deceitful and carnal yearnings displayed in Ildefonso Santos's "Sa Tabi ng Dagat" or the calming presence of religious and devotional faith revealed in Doris Olivar-Aquino's "Salamat, Salamat Panginoon." Gana is depicted as the very drive that invigorates our will to live and assists us in transcending an existence plagued by countless contradictions.

The strength of *Talinghaga ng Gana* is not its examination of gana itself, but its attempt, even if only incidental, at rewriting and revaluating twentieth-century Tagalog poetry. Añonuevo revitalizes the appreciation for works by writers like Amado V. Hernandez, Teo S. Baylen, Rio Alma, and Alejandro G. Abadilla. She examines these works outside the lens of critical tradition, which emphasize structured poetic form. Instead of reducing the meaning of a poem to its various elements working in tandem or in tension with one another—meter, rhyme, metaphor, theme, tone, among others—a method that has become the standard in evaluating Tagalog poetry, Añonuevo observes that there are other concerns to consider. Writing consciously as a female writer, she effeminizes Tagalog literature, allowing it to break away from the rigid norms established by old critics and scholars who have treated poetry as the symbolic Other. Thus, she asserts the role of the critic and poet's social, economic and ideological positions in the process of reading.

Her appraisal of Amado V. Hernandez's "Isang Dipang Langit" exemplifies this attempt to understand tradition differently. Instead of looking at the poem as part of a chronological development within a more evolved system, she relates it to events transpiring four decades after the poem's first publication in 1961:

Kakapiraso ang pinanggagalingan ng pag-asa ng tinig sa tula: *isang munting dungawan na ang kayang likumin ay isang dipang langit*. At iyon ang kamangha-mangha. Hindi ba't nakagigitla, at lubos na kamangha-

mangha, na ang isang misyonerong balo tulad ni Gracia Burnham, ay magbitaw ng salita para sa mga nagligtas na sundalo at buong sambayanang Filipino nang may buong paghanga at papuri sa Diyos sa kabila ng pagdurusa at sinapit na kamatayan ng asawa at isang nars sa kamay ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf? (172)

Añonuevo amplifies one's experience of poetry by mapping out the concrete connections between the symbol and its different manifestations in reality. Gana not only informs poetry and pushes it forward; it is the driving force central to all existence, allowing people to create and find purpose beyond the practical employment of words and other ways of constructing and deciphering signs.

More importantly, Añonuevo affords herself an opportunity to rewrite the canon. Her treatise on gana allows her to provide space in the canon for poets and works which would be excluded from it if one were to uphold tradition's unyielding standards. Albert E. Alejo, Elynia Mabanglo and even Añonuevo herself become an integral part of the canon from the point of view made possible by an understanding of gana.

JOSEPH SALAZAR

Kagawaran ng Filipino

Ateneo de Manila University



Nicanor G. Tiongson, **The Women of Malolos**. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004. 496 pages.

The past thirty years saw the emergence of multidisciplinary analyses of Philippine localities, a number focusing on gender and ethnicity issues, social relations, and the history of everyday life. Nicanor G. Tiongson's *The Women of Malolos* is a welcome addition to the emerging field of Philippine local history studies. It not only provides readers with a multi-layered understanding of nineteenth-century Philippines but also takes into account national, provincial, municipal, and district histories as they influenced the conditions of everyday life.