

A Glimpse at Children's Literature in the Philippines: A Sourcebook Review

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RESOURCE REVIEW

Book review of

Almario, V. S., Paterno, M.E., Sunico, R. C., & Villanueva, R. O. (Eds.). (1994). *Bumasa at lumaya: A sourcebook on children's literature in the Philippines*. Anvil Publishing, Inc.

and

Almario, A. R., Cruz, N. S.R., Sunico, R. C. (Eds.). (2016). *Bumasa at lumaya 2: A sourcebook on children's literature in the Philippines*. Anvil Publishing, Inc.

As a librarian, I truly believe in the power of reading. I want everyone to feel the joy of reading and hearing stories that would show the world and its culture, history, and values. With this in mind, I stumbled upon *Bumasa at Lumaya: A Sourcebook on Children's Literature in the Philippines*. It was about the state of our local children's literature initiated by the Philippine Board on Books for Young People (PBBY) to recognize all efforts in the creation and promotion of local children's literature and everyone who appreciates its value. The first volume was edited by Virgilio S. Almario, Ma. Elena Paterno, Raimon C. Sunico and Rene O. Villanueva in 1994. The second volume was edited by Ani Rosa Almario, Neni Sta. Romana Cruz, and Ramon C. Sunico in 2016.

LOOKING BACK ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

The *Introduction* presented misconceptions about children's literature clearing its definition. Neni Sta. Romana Cruz described the rules and regulations of the publishing industry as "inhospitable government rules and regulations (Almario et al., 1994, p. 2-3)" making the production of low-cost books harder. It was a bold and straightforward remark calling for

help to address this problem and provide support. In the second volume, access to libraries and books was among the mentioned challenges. It was refreshing that libraries were acknowledged as an integral part of the industry; however, the issue was not elaborated on much.

Looking Back shared the history and development of children's literature. Maria Elena Paterno narrated the history by period: pre-colonial, Spanish and American occupations. Virgilio Almario stated problems and breakthroughs like the lack of an established publishing house. Both authors introduced titles written in each period making their existence known but since only the title was given, access to these materials isn't mentioned. The question of where these materials are now should also be addressed.

In the second volume, *Bumasa at Lumaya 2*, which was written in Filipino, Eugene Y. Evasco echoed popular remarks on children's literature like Virgilio Almario's "hot pandesal mentality" (Almario et al., 2016, p. 9), alluding to the practice of the same popular themes getting published repeatedly. Despite this, he acknowledged the interactive e-books, the picture book applications and the regional publication of children's books in support of Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education which should have an in-depth discussion as these are important aspects in the advancement of local children's literature.

WRITING FOR CHILDREN

The Writer's Heart was written for aspiring writers. The first volume discussed writing in different literary forms. Literary form is "a mode of literary expression characterized by elements of internal structure, rather than by content" including fiction, poem, and play (Reitz, 2004, para. 358). The discussion was simple and easy to understand as it was accompanied by examples.

Bumasa at Lumaya 2, includes sections entitled *The Writer's Heart* and *Writers Speak*. Here different authors' inspiration, strategies and experiences were shared using interviews and roundtable discussions including that of Rene Villanueva. Although formal training courses and workshops are available, these could be an inspiration to those who couldn't decide how and what to write, igniting their passion and creativity specially since the conversations were transcribed as is. Filipino and English were used, bringing a comfortable and familiar vibe. However, some ideas couldn't be expounded just like the standards on writing for children mentioned by Rene Villanueva which would have been better if discussed comprehensively. This part only talked about writing in general with essays on poems and nonfiction writing. Problems in integrating poems into the curriculum like some poems "may not speak to Filipino children" (Almario et al., 2016, p. 43) and the possible retelling of old children's stories like *Ang Mga Kuwento ni Lola Basyang* were also raised.

The word "children" was clearly defined making it easier to identify who the children are and their difference from young adults. The volume included two essays on Young Adult literature briefly presenting the status of Philippine young adult literature. The authors mentioned the titles published each year, significant development and problems including marketing of books, incorporating teaching and study aids in the books and choosing novels based on recommended readings with some books with taboo themes not being chosen as educational materials. The discussion on the "divergence between what schools think their students should read and what readers themselves want to read" (Almario et al., 2016, p.123). was worthwhile giving value to readers' personal choices.

ILLUSTRATING FOR CHILDREN

Another section entitled *The Bookmaker's Art* introduced the development and importance of illustrations. The first volume traced its history and development in the local children's literature accompanied by sample illustrations, problems and issues. While the illustrations included were very helpful, it would be better if the samples were put to the discussion of the period when they were published. For example, the illustrations of the books published during the Spanish period were inserted before or after the discussion of that period to easily show how the illustrations improved through time. Illustrators' advice and descriptions of work and style were among the remaining discussion.

The second volume focused on illustrations and comics. Ruben de Jesus showed illustrations of Filipino children's books from 1983 to 2014 with a summary and explanation of the technique used. It would be better if the sample illustration of the specific book mentioned is put after or before the discussion so readers can easily locate and understand it. Additionally, some words used in the essay were unfamiliar to non-illustrators but this was somehow addressed at the beginning and the summary of one essay. Liza Flores shared the problems and improvements regarding illustrating for children which will surely open discussions and solutions for better opportunities. Paolo Chikiamco clearly defined comics in an essay on comics appreciation, tackled techniques used in publishing comic books and recommended titles categorized by subject/theme. Although he only listed the titles without description, it will still help the readers choose what to read. It would be helpful if he separated the local from international books in his recommendation.

READERS AND READING

The Reader's Part section was about reading and the readers. In the first volume, Nina Lim-Yuson wrote an essay on reading to children in every developmental stage which gave ideas on possible reading materials for different age groups. Nemah N. Hermosa discussed children's literature in the curriculum explaining how teachers use it to promote literacy and relate it to other subjects like mathematics, arts and music giving other educators insights. It was amazing that as early as 1994 children's literature was already incorporated into the curriculum. I noticed that most books mentioned in the essay were foreign. Moreover, access to children's books during this time was not mentioned much. This was probably because Republic Act No. 7743 was just approved in 1994 and not yet implemented. Still, it would be better if the state of children's literature in libraries were also explored.

Aside from *The Reader's Part*, which presented access to reading materials and promoted the love for reading, the second volume also had a part entitled *Book Reading and Learning* featuring reading educators. The discussion involved the importance of libraries and librarians in children's literature. Neni Sta. Romana Cruz honestly explained the situation in the Philippines where not all schools had libraries and librarians, and she then added some initiatives including the establishment of Library Hubs, "warehouse or wholesale libraries" established in different schools divisions by the Department of Education (DepEd), the local government and the private sector (Almario et al., 2016, p. 209). I appreciate this discussion but it makes me think, are

these initiatives enough? Because sadly, having these initiatives show that there is not enough support to build school libraries and hire qualified librarians. The initiatives were just becoming band-aid remedies, not long-term solutions. More DepEd's plans should be raised like establishing school libraries as their way of adapting to the Standards for Philippine Libraries endorsed through the Dep. Ed. Order No. 56 s. 2011. On a positive note, a manual on establishing library hubs was initiated by Zarah C. Gagatiga which could make library hubs good temporary libraries and providers of supplementary reading materials. It was written in detail covering important aspects of libraries like collection development planning. The second volume's last part showed the insights of reading educators on what themes they are looking for in the curriculum which could be an inspiration to other educators and also what they think are missing in the children's literature industry which could help bridge the gap. Dina Ocampo talking about equality in education in the Philippines, where not all children have access to schools and even reading materials, supports the need for establishing school libraries in every school; to give the children an equal opportunity and access to books and aid the information needs of the teachers. Lastly, the Four-Pronged approach, the need for literature in the region for the children to be exposed to their own culture, and the crafting of a literary canon that will include recommended titles for suggested readings in specific ages were introduced, although they need to be discussed more.

THE FUTURE

The awards given in the children's literature industry were listed with descriptions making this book a great selection tool for librarians, teachers and parents. The contributors' background in the second volume shows their credibility making it easier to give credit. Expanding the ideas and discussion on topics like the translation to local languages, the regional publication, the retelling of old stories, comics appreciation and young adult literature will be significant in the future. Aside from writers, illustrators and teachers, parents and librarians could also be of help with issues on access, choices and selection of books, budget and pricing. Their voices could provide future directions to the children's literature industry. After all, they know children better as they spend more time with them at home, at school and in the library. Children, as the main audience, could contribute as well. Honest reviews and comments on books they read could be used to know what other improvements are needed. The discussion on incorporating children's literature into the curriculum could be consulted for Philippine

education. Specifically, for the LIS education, this book could be used for courses on Children's and Young Adult Literature since the history, issues and problems of local children's literature were presented here in detail which could promote critical thinking.

This sourcebook is an all-in-one resource, from writing to illustrating to reading; everything is discussed with equal importance. Each chapter and essay opens up discussion on problems and development in the industry. This would be a great inspiration for everyone interested in children's literature and who wants to gain new knowledge and insights that will help in supporting it. Overall, I feel proud of what this sourcebook has to offer. I feel satisfied at the same time excited about what other developments we will see in the future; hopefully, with more books like this in the future.

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