

SANTOS, ALFONSO P. (reteller and editor). 1979. *Romance in Philippine names. Mythical origins of Philippine place names and objects.* Manila: National Book Store, Inc. Pp. xi, 270.

Reviewed by MA. BELEN ALAMPAY, De La Salle University

*Romance in Philippine Names* is, without doubt, a valuable contribution to Philippine folk literature. Gathering the names together in a collection is both timely and commendable, in the light of our present efforts to deepen our understanding of ourselves as a people. And what better way than to rediscover the values and ideals, hopes and dreams, of our distant and as yet noncolonial past, as embodied in our folk tales.

As a collection of stories to retell our children; of short tales to read during our leisure hours; or, as the author puts it, as stories to amuse foreign readers, the book is somewhat tedious to read due to the monotony of characters, plots, events, and turns of events. At times, one feels that one is simply reading a remake of the same story, with minor variations of names, setting, and ending. Thus, it is not a book to be read in one sitting. Nonetheless, it is a valuable resource material representing a cross section of the country's folk tales, from where sociologists, psychologists, literary critics, and philosophers may look for a glimpse into the Filipino soul, his ethics, his concept of happiness and pain, his psychological and emotional motivations, and even his general concept of life, and his attitudes towards his environment, both social and natural.

As folk tales are essentially meant to be oral, the process of putting them in print, has left us with an *editorialized version* of tales which have sadly lost a lot of their local color. The fault is, of course, not entirely the author's, for in the same manner, who can express in a musical scale, the emotion, pathos and passion of a gypsy chant that is essentially meant to be recited not written, heard not read?

Among other things, the book *Romance in Philippine Names*, provides us with a geographic guidebook on the lovely sights, scenes, and places (mountains, rivers, lakes, hills, volcanos, trees) in our archipelago, more specifically those that we Filipinos have especially learned to love, almost as a friend, to the extent of romanticizing their presence and preserving them in legends. Even in this, we discover the Filipino's sense of beauty and poetic sensitivity.

It will be fruitful to analyze from stories such as these, which authentically flow from primitive psychological sources untampered by colonial re-education, what the Filipino *ideal* originally was: to understand his pervading sense of the tragic in life and his notably absent sense of the comic. To understand these stories and the psychological streams from which they flow, is to understand the Filipino at his most primitive, most pure, most innocent, state of mind.

To understand these stories, not as oversimplistic tales, but as the symbolic expression of something deeper in the psyche of our race is to relive that experience of our forefathers, who felt that cosmic unity of his life with that of nature; who believed that nature grieved with his misfortunes and rejoiced in his triumphs, and who saw nature as an extension of his own struggles, and of his very being.

There is much to learn from these tales. This is one of the starting points from which the search for our cultural identity can begin.