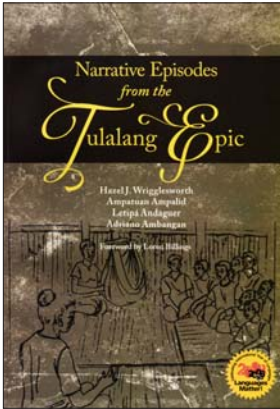


BOOK REVIEW

A POLYPHONIC COLLECTION OF NARRATIVES



Narrative Episodes from the Tulalang Epic. Hazel J. Wrigglesworth (comp. & transl.), Ampatuan Ampalid, Letipá Andaguer, Adriano Ambangan. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 2008. 274 pp.

Hazel J. Wrigglesworth has compiled a number of publications of folk tales – more general anthologies (1981) and collections consolidating the variants of one plot (e.g. Wrigglesworth 1991), or the stories of one narrator (e.g. Wrigglesworth & Mengersengilid 1993). The guarantee for the coherence of the current collection is the common theme – encompassing stories delivering the narrative episodes of one of the most popular – Tulelangan – epics of the Ilianen Manobo.

The book, comprising four tales recorded during 1962–1995, by narrators Ampatuan Ampalid, Letipá Andaguer and Adriano Ambangan, is in two languages, with the original in the Ilianen Manobo, on the left, and the English translation on the right, equipped with footnotes explicating the linguistic, rhetoric and cultural nuances. In addition, there are references to the type catalogue of tales and to motif numbers (proceeding from AT, not the ATU catalogue), to relate the stories to a wider international context. However, the publisher also gives a warning not to expect the genre definition from the type numbers – although the reference to folktale catalogue associates the stories with fairy-tales, i.e. with the genre not related to beliefs, the Ilianen Manobo themselves actually regard the tales as part of their oral history (see, e.g., p. 7).

Wrigglesworth notes, in the introduction, that Tulelangan – the story of the immortal hero Tulalang – is one of the two major epics of the Ilianen Manobo. Yet differently from the *Ulahingan* epic cycle, relatively difficult to be understood for modern readers due to the archaic language, Tulelangan, with more up-to-date language use, continues to be popular among the older as well as the younger generation. Still, the presenting in song of the Tulelangan happens on rare occasions, as there are not enough professional singers and the process would be too time-consuming (see p. 2); formal storytelling of the epic continues to be topical “in recalling the precedents in the formal settling of Manobo “custom law” cases, *kukuman*” (p. 3). Indeed, the current collection mainly comprises the prose tales, although there are unfortunately no comments concerning the fact whether any of these stories have actually been a reason for a court case.

In general, the entire collection could be reproached for being somewhat contextually idealised – there is absolutely no information about the recording context or the background of the storytellers, with only a pencil picture of a typical narrating situation depicted on the cover of the book. Even the comments added to the tales are not focusing on the specificity of the concrete storytelling situation but instead, describe

the general rhetoric devices, and the potential ways of using them. (In addition, it tends to be tedious to read the recurrent verbatim comments on rhetoric devices during a longer period of reading).

*

Irrespective of what is said above, it was indeed a positive experience for me to read the book; one of the features I really liked (and which also somewhat alleviated the lack of context with regard to the stories) was the fact that, in addition to the narrator's tale and the comments by the researcher, there was also a third voice: interjections by the listeners, giving a dramatic nuance to the written tales and reminding *the reader* that an oral narrative is never a mere text, instead, the entire event as a communicative integrity is of relevance. "The telling is the tale; therefore, the narrator, his story, and his audience are all related to each other as components of a single continuum which is the communicative event." (Ben-Amos 1971: 10) Highlighting of this communicative component makes it possible to see what makes the stories significant for the narrators and for the listeners.

Likewise, the diversity of the communicative situation becomes more distinct: some of the comments are targeted at the narrator and others at the characters in the story, and the third ones evaluate the behaviour of characters. The aim of the first is to convince the storyteller to continue, confirming that the listeners are still there, following the story with great attention: *Nè be!* – 'Keep going (don't stop here)!' (33); *Hedù!* – 'Keep on! [You're telling it just like it happened.]' (103), and other comments refer to how a good storyteller can make the listeners become participants in his narration, creating a feeling in the listeners as if they could make direct contact with the characters: *Nè, nè, nè!* – 'Watch out!' (27); *Ey, Pilas, netuen ke en!* – 'Ey, Monkey, you've been discovered!' (29); *Uya, su ayan dè ma mulà.* – 'Yes, but that's only what he was pretending to do.' (97). The third type of comments are part of intra-community communication – by way of judging the behaviour of the characters, the listeners verify to each other the validity of certain collectively accepted norms. *Midtantu ve iya ini se datù.* – 'This chief really overdid his eating.' (27); *Metekudi imbe ne mence kenakan!* – 'Really shameful young-men!' (59); *Aday, tarù din an.* – 'Aday, he's lying.' (113).

Moreover – besides stressing the narrative, oral and communicative nature of what is written, these comments obtain a totally new communicative task in the book context – when set in the position of a title, these comments become the initial guide for the *readers* of the book. For instance, the title of the first story, *The Famous Young-man who Disguised himself as a Monkey*, originates from a comment in the beginning of the story: "Keep on, for this is the Famous Young-man who disguised himself as a young monkey." (11). In narration context, the aim of this utterance is to encourage the narrator to go on and also to confirm (for the narrator and the co-listeners) that the story and the character have been recognised. The latter is important as usually, the name of the main character is not used until the very end of the tale – the same goes for this story, at first the narrator talks about the monkey, whereas the one who made the comment, indicates that he had understood that this story belongs within the Tulelangan cycle – *The Famous Young-man* is one of the most prevalent name shapes for Tulalang (although the narrator refers to the name of the character only on page 71). Yet now, when

used as the title, the comment becomes positioned in a relatively different communicative situation – it ceases to be the feedback given to the storyteller but instead is a hint given to the reader (who remains outside the group), to understand the story more adequately.

*

Wrigglesworth notes in the beginning of the book that the initiative to record and publish the tales actually came from the Manobo themselves who realised, as the number of dedicated storytellers is constantly decreasing, that there is a need to find other possibilities to pass on the stories to future generations: “For, as they explained, these narratives embody the very Manobo cultural heritage that has thus far been successfully preserved *rut te kelukesan te enenayan ne melimbag rut te langun dut te sikami ne Manuvù* ‘from our very first ancestors created down to all of us Manobos today.’” (ix) In addition, Wrigglesworth underlines the wish of storytellers to publish their repertoire: “I am also grateful to the narrators represented in this volume for not giving up in their encouragement for me to publish narratives from their repertoires of Manobo Oral Literature.” (ix)

Although there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of these statements, they do raise certain questions. For instance, Lauri Honko has written: “Interest in such documentation is rare inside the oral cultures which produce epic performances as part of their annual cycle of feasts, rituals or working techniques.” (Honko 2000: 28) The reason for my question is not so much this generalisation given by Honko, but actually his personal experience of a totally opposite case – Gopala Naika, the presenter of the Siri epic was actively searching for someone who would be able to record his knowledge. At the same time, Honko also highlights that the songster wanted to record his wisdom but he was in great difficulties to imagine his performance in the form of a book: “The performative and referential elements abolished in the process seemed so essential to him.” (Honko 2000: 34) Thus, Honko sees the compilation of the book as an inter-semiotic translation process the aim of which, instead of reconstructing the initial storytelling-situation, is readable text, which would fit into the literary context of other textualised epics (meant to be read): “If the oral text has any literary value, it will, after all, bloom, not wither, in writing.” (Honko 2000: 37)

In the light of such a directions towards literacy, Honko’s approach seems to be quite different from what Wrigglesworth seems to strive for; another marked difference is also the fact that Honko has consciously not written any comments (Honko 2000: 38). Yet the main difference between the two is the fact that the Honko approach to the issue is in re-thought, with full consciousness about the contradictory nature of the process and its outcome, whereas Wrigglesworth does not pay attention to these matters.

Another relatively illustrative possibility for comparison concerns the attempts of Richard and Nora Marks Dauenhauer to compile a publication of Tlingit tales and do this “from a Tlingit point of view and in a way acceptable to the oral tradition bearers and the Tlingit community” (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1995: 92). Similar to Honko and Wrigglesworth, the Dauenhauers also proceeded from the initiative of the tradition bearers. Yet contrary to Honko, who deemed it positive for such a text to appear in the literary sphere, the Dauenhauers aimed at avoiding the conventional literary canon.

Or, more precisely: one of the underlying motivational factors in their work was the dissatisfaction of (illiterate!) narrators with the earlier publications of Tlingit tales, which presented these folk tales as children's literature, with no references to the storytellers. Thus, the goal for the Dauenhauers was to issue a collection of tales that would please the bearers of tradition, whereas the target audience was supposed to be the younger generation of the Tlingit people.

These two aims, however, turned out to be incompatible: the grandchildren's generation, of the storytellers who had cooperated with the researchers, was not capable of relating to this publication: "The older generation of tradition bearers was disturbed that Tlingit literature in its written form would become too "bookish", too disembodied. But some of the younger generation are disturbed because it [...] does not follow the literary models and conventions of the contemporary children's literature in English with which they are raising their children." (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1995: 100).

Bearing in mind the above examples it would now be appropriate to ask how did Wrigglesworth's informants construe the undertaking of the researcher (although in her case the question is ever more intriguing due to the fact that in addition to the narrator, the listeners also have a say in Wrigglesworth's book). One of the hints that their attitude was not always uniform (as revealed from Wrigglesworth's acknowledgement of gratitude), can be found in the foreword of the tale collection from 1991, *The Maiden of many Nations*, where Wrigglesworth notes that the peoples represented in the book with their tales "are presently living in a time of rapid social change that is affecting the basic traditions that have had a vital part in shaping their culture" (3).

The latter has brought about the situation where the attitudes, of the younger and older generation, to "oral literature" are quite different: if the older generation believes in the reality of these stories, then the younger generation – schooled and educated – can "distinguish almost without exception this folktale category of their oral literature as "make-believe."" (Wrigglesworth 1991: 3–4 It is highly unlikely that such an education related difference would not affect the understanding of different generations with regard to the nature and need of the work of a folklorist; or what kind of books should be compiled, for whom and for what purpose these books are published.

Another interesting quote by Wrigglesworth is from the collection, *Good Character and Bad Character: The Manobo Storytelling Audience As Society's Jurors* (1993), where she says how lack of school education had played an important role in Pengendà Mengsenggilid becoming an acknowledged storyteller (Wrigglesworth 1993: 5). Thus, the wish of Mengsenggilid to record and publish her narratives can also be regarded as her hope to enter the sphere of literacy, with a book of her own tales. At the same time, her intention should not be seen through the prism of literacy intrinsic of Western culture, but instead, through the personal understanding towards writing and the essence of books. The latter, however, would introduce a new domain referred to by different authors as *grassroot literacy* (Fabian 1993), *tin-trunk literacy* (Barber 2007) and *vernacular literacy* (Barton & Hamilton 2003) – all these authors have highlighted the inevitable connection of this phenomenon with what the researchers of culture do, namely the writing down of oral texts.

The issue concerning the differences in understanding and rendering value to writing, and books, becomes more complicated as the tales encompassed in the collection of

Narrative Episodes from the Tulalang Epic have been recorded for over more than 30 years (1962–1995); supposedly, the attitudes of the audience and these of the narrators have significantly altered in the course of time. On the one hand, these changes are certainly associated with general social development and changes in the availability of education yet on the other hand, the researchers have also had a (smaller or bigger) role in this – their interest in recording the narratives, and the books published as an outcome.

In conclusion, I hope that the next books compiled by Hazel J. Wrigglesworth will contain, in addition to fascinating narrations, some more references to the issues concerning the written recording of these oral texts, and the hopes and expectations of different parties involved.

Katre Kikas

References

- Barber, Karin 2007. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics. Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barton, David & Hamilton, Mary 2003 [1998]. *Local Literacies. Reading and Writing in One Community*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ben Amos, Dan 1971. Toward a definition of Folklore in Context. *Journal of American Folklore* 84, pp. 3–15. [Published in Estonian: Ben-Amos, Dan 2009. Folkloori defineerimine konteksti kaudu. *Kommunikatsioon ja folkloor*. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.]
- Dauenhauer, Richard & Dauenhauer, Nora Marks 1995. Oral Literature Embodied and Disembodied. In: U. M. Quasthoff (ed.) *Aspects of Oral Communication*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 91–111.
- Fabian, Johannes 1993. Keep Listening: Ethnography and Reading. In: J. Boyarin (ed.) *Ethnography of Reading*. Berkeley & Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California Press, pp. 80–97.
- Honko, Lauri 2000. Text as process and practice: the textualization of oral epics. In: L. Honko (ed.) *Textualization of Oral Epics*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 3–54.
- Wrigglesworth, Hazel J. (ed.) 1981. *An Anthology of Ilianen Manobo Folktales*. University of San Carlos.
- Wrigglesworth, Hazel J. (ed.) 1991. *The Maiden of many Nationas: The Skymaden Who Married a Man from Earth*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.
- Wrigglesworth, Hazel J. (ed.) & Mengsenggilid, Pengendà 1993. *Good Character and Bad Character. The Manobo Storytelling Audience As Society's Jurors*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.