

Saving Pangasinan literature

by GABRIEL CARDINOZA
Inquire.net

DAGUPAN CITY — Pangasinan's writers are in an uphill climb in their effort to save the dying Pangasinan literature.

Aside from the dearth of writers in the vernacular, members of the Uluan na Pansiansia'y Salitan Pangasinan (Association for the Preservation of the Pangasinan Language) say they have not been getting enough support to implement projects that will encourage a literary resurgence.

"Pangasinan [writers] on June 24 lack the invigorating environment of a literary movement. We are alone in a wasteland ... We are a dying tribe on the verge of extinction," says Santiago Villafania, the province's leading umaanlong (poet), who is also a member of the Uluan.

With a population of 2.65 million, half of whom are Pangasinan-speaking, Villafania says the province has only three short story writers, two novelists, six poets and one essayist. Only three of them have published books in the last six years.

Literary silence

"After half a century of literary silence, sadly, this is all we've written," says Villafania, a faculty member and a senior web designer of the Emilio Aguinaldo College in Manila.

In fact, Villafania's books may be the only ones dwelling on Pangasinan poetry since the

turn of the 20th century. His first, *Pinabli tan arum ni'ran Anlong*, was published in 2003, followed four years later by *Malagilion: Sonnets tan Villanelles*, a finalist in the 2007 National Book Award (poetry category)—a first for a Pangasinan poetry book.

In 2005, Villafania published a Pangasinan poetry booklet, *Balikas ed Caboloan*.

Freelance writer and Uluan member Erwin Fernandez says the problem is that Pangasinan is still not used in teaching in schools despite the availability of Pangasinan literary materials written from the 1930s to the 1960s.

"The names of Catalino Palisoc (1865-1932) and Pablo Mejia (1872-1934), only two among the renowned *zarzuela* writers, come to mind when we speak of Pangasinan literature. We must not miss Maria Magsano, the educator-writer and suffragist who put up the *Silew magazine*," says Fernandez, who taught at the University of the Philippines' departments of history and Filipino.

"In the annals of Philippine vernacular literature, these illustrious names rank among the best in Tagalog, Ilocano and Cebuano literatures," he says.

Magsano and Juan Villamil were the leading Pangasinan fiction writers of their time. Both have published their own anthologies.

Fernandez also says that unlike other languages, such as Ilocano, Tagalog and Visayan,

Pangasinan does not have a publication in the vernacular. Thus, he adds, there is no proper venue for aspiring writers and authors.

"The Ilocanos have the weekly *Bannawag magazine*, the Tagalogs have *Liwayway*, and the Visayans have the *Hiligaynon* and *Bisaya*, popular vernacular magazines where one ordinarily finds short stories, essays, poems and other occasional pieces," he says.

Since its founding in 2000, Uluan has struggled to publish a monthly magazine called *Balon Silew*. The magazine, however, has not been coming out regularly due to shortage of funds.

Media role

Melchor Orpilla, an Alaminos City-based poet and broadcaster, says media play an important role in the resurgence of Pangasinan literature and language.

"There is a prevailing thinking, especially among the youth, that speaking in Pangasinan is *bakya* (pedestrian). The media can inject into the people's consciousness that they should not be ashamed to speak in Pangasinan," Orpilla says.

When this is done, he says, people will start reading or appreciating literary works in Pangasinan. "Unless the present generation acts concertedly to preserve it, Pangasinan shall always be in an unhappy position pushed into the periphery of oral and literary avenues," Fernandez says. ■

Senators warn against revolutionary government scenario

MANILA — Senators warned on June 25 against propositions allowing President Arroyo to stay in power and a military-backed "revolutionary government" under her to amend the Constitution.

Lawyer Homobono Adaza, who was earlier accused of being part of the destabilization attempt against the Arroyo government last year, said there was no one among the presidential hopefuls qualified to replace Mrs. Arroyo and that only she could best serve the interest of the Filipino people.

Sen. Loren Legarda said this kind of statement was inviting chaos.

"Now we hear of a scenario in which President Arroyo is urged to declare a revolutionary government, presumably because no one is qualified to run for president in the 2010 elections," she said.

"That's as outlandish an idea as it can get because we do not lack qualified candidates for the highest office of the land. Likewise, Filipinos would have none of whatever extra-constitutional measures the administration may be considering just to stay in power past 2010."

"What do they want to do? To invite the same level of protest by the people like what is now being seen in Iran?"

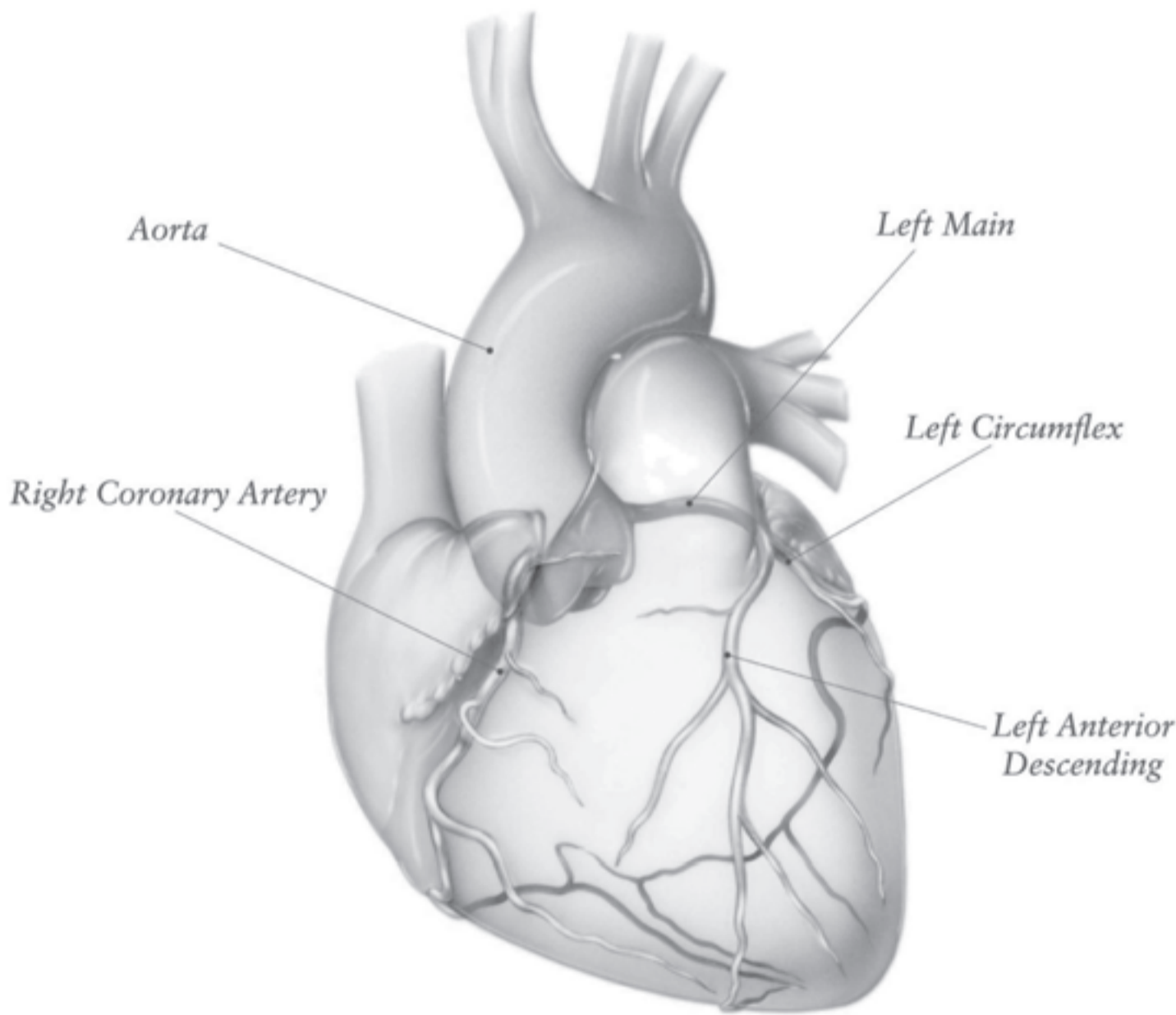
Sen. Richard Gordon said Mrs. Arroyo can declare a revolutionary government to remain in power.

"To me, you could do that, if there is really a will, abolish Congress and declare a revolutionary government. For example, if the elections fail, if massive violence is perpe-

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