

and another one could be the impression that *Clásicos hispano filipinos* is a neo-imperial or revisionist enterprise because it is mainly funded by Instituto Cervantes, an organization created by the Spanish government. However way one wishes to approach it, the fact remains that *Clásicos hispano filipinos* opens new and multidirectional pathways for the study of Philippine literature in Spanish. As Italo Calvino says, “A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say.” Thus, it is hoped that these books—as *clásicos* more than *hispano filipinos*—soon find a well-deserved, broad, and scholarly readership.

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Ralph Semino Galán. *Discernments: Literary Essays, Cultural Critiques and Book Reviews*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013. 99 pages.

The practice of discernment demands keen insight, incisive judgment, and intelligent discrimination based on standards that are clearly articulated and soundly reasoned. That the word also refers to the manner by which Christians attempt to determine how God desires them to live their lives can only render projects that aver to discern and to be discerning more daunting for their authors. Such is the burden carried by this book, a collection of previously published scholarly and popular articles, by Ralph Semino Galán, who admits at the outset to a “chronic lack of self-confidence” in his “capacity as a creative-critical writer” (vii).

This curious confession, however, is at once mitigated, if not militated against, by the occasionally polemical introduction from Oscar V. Campomanes. Suffused with remarkable generosity of spirit, the essay does not content itself just with providing an overview of what the book contains; it takes pains to install Galán in a locus of continuities that reach back to Lope K. Santos and Nick Joaquin, and forward to Ferdinand M. Lopez and Isidoro M. Cruz. Moreover, it lays down the terms along which Galán’s discourse operates, as well as those within which it ought to be read. Galán’s model of writing, Campomanes argues, involves the sublation of creative-critical and theoretical material, which in turn allows for the subsumption of such material into the function of critique, thus making the familiar new and rendering accessible what is usually difficult while retaining rigor.

What can be said for the book is that the enthusiasm and affection brought to bear upon the texts analyzed—ranging from poetry collections to novels, from children’s literature to ballet—are considerable. Fulsome with praise and tilted toward the celebratory, the compendium exemplifies criticism less as a type of sanctioned aggression, a notion that saddles with unprofitable connotations an activity that is all too vital to the growth of cultural life, than as a kind of advocacy.

Discernments seems most sure-footed when it hews to the procedure of close reading drawn from New Criticism. When it cares to be methodical, the results are lucid and useful, especially when key concepts are illustrated, paving a path upon which the uninitiated might tread toward more fluent dialogues with, and more trenchant investigations of, literary and cultural texts.

The book, however, also displays waywardness in its rhetorical maneuvers and theoretical assumptions, as in the first essay on the poems of Edith L. Tiempo. It purports to build a case for the ascendancy of her love poetry, which, supposedly, unlike work by other authors, dissolves the dichotomy between heart and mind, thought and feeling. But the study is founded on faulty generalizations: “most love poems,” it proclaims, “only touch the heart due to their emotional effusiveness,” “are either too esoteric or too erotic for comfort,” and—this pertaining specifically to Philippine literature—susceptible to “sentimentality and mushiness.” These declarations are then wholly negated when Galán grants the existence of “a vast corpus of great love poetry” (3–4) in the world.

Instead of earnest readings of representative love poems by Tiempo, the study proffers summary treatments of “Mystical Union” (1966) and “Between-Living” (1993) before latching onto “Bonsai” (1972), where the competence of the discussion is undermined by the unsubstantiated contention that the widely anthologized piece is “often misread” (6). There is, additionally, an unfortunate detour through biographical trivia. The paper concludes by stating that “Bonsai” is a masterpiece, and that Tiempo is worthy of the honor of National Artist for Literature. The essay, therefore, is hardly fresh, barely develops its announced aim, and, since it opens by acknowledging the preeminence of Tiempo in Philippine poetry, is tautological.

Uncorroborated claims, unelaborated arguments, and disparities between objective and outcome—such and similar lapses run through the book, as in the following cases: a so-called symptomatic analysis of *Shoes++* by Ballet Philippines as a commentary against “mercantile capitalism” (62) is dominated by descriptions of what was explicitly staged, not interpretations of what was left out or repressed; a “ cursory reading” (45) of a dozen lyric poems about Baguio, including one of Galán’s own, proceeds from the dubious premise that poets are “sensitive and sensible individuals with strong personalities” who “have a strong resilience against the prevailing ideology

of contemporary times” and who are thus able to access and convey, in subversion of “traditional representations” and “generic itineraries,” allegedly authentic experiences in the City of Pines (44, 56); and a review of *The Gaze: Poems* (2004) by Arvin Abejo Mangohig begins by suggesting that desire is “seldom tackled in Philippine poetry with such a great amount of candor and charisma” (91), overlooking the long and lively lineage of erotic writing in the Philippines.

It must be noted, further, that while the book is interested in the writings of women and voices feminist sympathies, its politics are questionable: “poetess” is used without qualification to refer to Tiempo, Dimalanta, and Nerisa del Carmen Guevara, and one of the better developed studies in the volume declares that it would like to prove that Isabel Allende deserves to be incorporated into the male-dominated Latin American literary canon. The goal is perhaps not ignoble, but, considering that the paper professes to come from a socialist feminist perspective, which sees the various forms of oppression in capitalist society as interwoven and mutually reinforcing, it is problematic. Why be concerned with inserting a marginalized figure into a pantheon of masters when the mechanisms of canon formation—indeed, the very idea of a canon—are themselves necessarily implicated within capitalism and cry out for interrogation?

The book directs more than one appeal to “the sensitive reader,” but whatever the strengths it capitalizes on or the opportunities that it takes advantage of, it does not benefit from its looseness—whether its readers will come away satisfied is, finally, a matter of discernment.

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Jack G. Wigley. *Falling into the Manhole: A Memoir*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2012. 140 pages.

There may be no better way to get acquainted with Jack G. Wigley’s *Falling into the Manhole: A Memoir* than to read the first entry, “A Writer’s Journey to Memoir Writing.” As Wigley expresses his love for reading and writing, he also uncovers the main hurdle in his life: growing up poor, fatherless, and different, because he is the illegitimate gay son of an American serviceman and a Filipina. In the same essay he also classifies the sixteen narratives as drawn from his interest and experiences in