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Women Reading, by Kintanar

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such as this tend to be egotistical, private, and sometimes a little self-indulgent. Who, after all, is Jimmy Abad, Wendell Capili, Preachy Legasto, Neil Garcia, or indeed, Hidalgo herself, outside the small academic circle that their stories should be worth remembering?

But like Whitman's spider ever launching forth "filament, filament, filament out of itself," writings like Hidalgo's *Coming Home* will catch somewhere. There will be people—and not just other writers in English or academics—as eager to listen to Hidalgo's stories as she is eager to share them, for ultimately, what these essays do is to rouse the desire in us to look back and remember—a desire that can be described only by using the now unfashionable and much-discredited word "universal."

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Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on Philippine Literary Texts.

By Thelma B. Kintanar. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1992.

This book is a collection of essays on the reading of Philippine literary texts from a feminist consciousness. It tries to present how the texts are interwoven with the reality of what is it to be a woman in the context of Philippine culture and society. The texts span several generations and begin during the times when women were accorded an elevated status in the society, long before the Spanish rule changed this special status. They extend up to the present times, when women writers try to reestablish this formerly enjoyed status, not only in the literary field but most especially in day-to-day living.

The book starts with a journey through the literary history of Philippine literature, both oral or written. As clearly stated in the first chapter, "The writer and her roots," the book tries to establish the seemingly overlooked and forgotten linkage of contemporary women writers to their leaders, their forebears, not only in the less remote past when the Philippines was still under the patriarchal rule of the Spanish colonizers but even earlier, in precolonial times, where women served as priestesses and religious leaders. Therefore, they were the bearers of several forms of literature, particularly oral literature, and possessed roles of prime importance. However, things changed when the Spaniards came.

The importance for the contemporary Filipino women writers and their counterpart in other countries to search for their roots in order to have a sense of tradition is amply emphasized in the book, for it asserts that women have become the result of "what had been done to them, and what little

they had been allowed to do in the past, and what they can be by taking an active part in shaping their lives and destiny." This reality shapes the consciousness of the modern Filipino women.

The second chapter stresses the importance of rereading from a feminine perspective the more famous traditional literary texts considered written from a patriarchal point of view. It is also supposed that in the past, "women have not been aware of themselves as women reading, they have read in the context of a male-dominated culture and have assumed primarily androcentric points of view, without a sense of themselves as the Other." The second chapter picks up a traditional religious text as its subject, *Pasyon Pilapil*, which is supposed to contain two contradictory "images of women": Eve as the root of evil and Mary as the origin of good. It is construed in the *Pasyon* that biological reproduction is the essence of femaleness and, as Eve's punishment, child-bearing is being cursed by the pain of delivering a child. On the other hand, being the origin of goodness, Mary is believed to be spared from this ability to reproduce—the supposed "punishment"—by her exclusion from any carnal knowledge. The book also analyzes other texts, like the novels mostly written by male writers in the early part of the twentieth century. These novels seemingly reinforced the negative or stereotyped representation of Filipino women. They portray women as weak and indecisive, as victims and wretches.

Chapter 3 gives a rereading of literary works today, which include several works written by women. It asserts that just as women read from an androcentric point of view, they also write from the same point of view. As a consequence, they suffer invisibility and occupy a low place in a literary field dominated mostly by men. It affirms that the dynamism of reading as a woman goes to several stages, starting from the usually assumed male position and patriarchal values, to a more developed feminist consciousness. It maintains the invaluable tasks of women reading women's writing "to render women writers more visible and to bring to the surface women's experiences and women's consciousness."

Finally, the volume declares that the very plurality of approaches that the feminist reader brings to both female and male texts constitute the richness of feminist criticism. This is a way to understand how a patriarchal point of view, both in literature and in life, diminishes and damages woman, forcing her into the position of the "Other," psychologically crippling her so she is unable to attain her full human potential. Thus women are led to work for the transformation of patriarchy in order to have a society that ensures equality and justice for both women and men.

After a thorough analysis of the book which uses a feminist perspective of Philippine literary texts, one is left in almost total agreement with the position of the women writers. Their arguments are valid and indeed, convincing.

There is one thing, however, that I want to stress. It is not the androcentric point of view that marginalizes women. It is the evil or abuse that goes with

it. In the same way, it is the good or the chivalrous nature of this point of view that makes men adore women, pamper women, protect them from danger, fight for them against their attackers, and love them wholeheartedly. I believe this is what the book fails to note.

Be that as it may, this is a book worth reading especially by men who (still) think a woman should not have a room—or a writing table—of her own.

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KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980–1994. By Kim Scipes. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1996. (Available in North America from Sulu Arts and Books in San Francisco).

Kim Scipes begins his important new book by saying that although “Third World” workers and peasants have been depicted in the media as being largely impoverished and powerless, what is seldom conveyed to us is that these same people take extraordinary risks to improve the quality of their lives and societies. The *KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980–1994* is a ground-breaking achievement in the direction of writing this largely unwritten history of the struggle of the Filipino laboring classes to obtain decent working conditions and wages.

The Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU—May First Movement) takes on a new and creative approach to organizing labor that differs substantially from prevailing Western labor-union models that are limited solely to the business sector. First, the KMU has developed from an indigenous perspective of the working classes in relation to the larger struggle for national liberation from colonial and neocolonial domination by Spain (1565–1898), by the United States (1898–1946), and subsequently by collaborating Filipino elites. Second, the organizational structure of the KMU begins from the point of production in the physical setting of the workplace (e.g., a sugar plantation, department store, or factory). Accordingly, the methodological and theoretical approaches to local liberation differs from movements outside the workplace. Third, the kind of social-movement unionism espoused and practiced by the KMU diverges sharply from other working-class movements (e.g., reformist-type trade unions, or classical Marxist labor unions around the world) that target the working classes, rather than all exploited classes, as the chief agents of social and economic change. In effect, the KMU stands out as a seemingly unprecedented example of a new kind of revolutionary labor union that joins hands with all other groups that struggle against domination and exploitation.