

ROSALINDA V. PINEDA

GENESIS

Ang kababaihan ay babangon mula sa alabok
Gaya ng mga puting bulaklak na namumuko
sa nag-aapoy na gabi
Upang mamukadkad sa umagang daratal.

Lalagutin nila ang tanikala
Ng mga kasinungalingang hinabi
mula sa matatamis na tinapay
Upang pandayin ang isang mundo
ng tapat na kalalakihan.

Gagamitin nila ang kanilang mga kamao
Na matagal nang pinigil
ng manhid na pagtitiis
Upang wasakin ang mga idolong may sinag sa ulo
na nililok sa laman ng tao.

Ang kababaihan ay babangon mula sa alabok
At hahalikan nila ang langit.

A POET'S MEASURE

If you've known the deepest wounds
of the wretched
the soaring flights of the victor
as well as all else that lie
between
Then you are a poet.

You can confess the demarcations
of love and hate
What world to mold and
what world to tear down
Whom to damn
and whom to call sister
How much is lost in the giving
and the day-to-day dying
How much of what is left is woman
and how much is child...

If you know the full measure
of one life
Then you are a poet.

You are woman's yesterday
and her tomorrow.

ALINLANGAN

Sabi nila
Panulaa'y baog
kung hindi mananaog
kung ang pantig
di sisisid
sa dibdib ng madla

Ba't takot bumaba
sa hagdan ng pagsubok?

Pluma'y nangangalog
Baka tinta'y sumabog
Baka linya'y tangayin ng agos
at mauwi sa wala
ang damdaming kumalas
sa pagkakagapos

Panulaa'y parusa
sa mga bantulot pakilala
nguni't maya't maya'y tinutulak
ng konsiyensiya't pangarap.

DESIGN

To weave-- patterns—
Thread upon thread
through each day.

To unravel – patterns –
Tear upon tear
Through each night.

To weave to unravel
To unravel to weave
The patterns take shape ---

Roses and rain and beautiful eyes
Blood and mud and rifle fire
In the tapestry of my life.

TO ALING ROSITA

Your hands tell your tale
 ever so poignantly
Heavy as the weight
 on your shoulders
Light as the kiss
 of dead, dying babies
Emptied of lover
 who wanted them gentle
Full of children to raise,
 to rise
From the days of hunger
From the depths of wretchedness

They soak in soap all week
Press the iron, till the soil
There is no rest, no end
To the barter of flesh and bone

They are gnarled and chaffed;
In strength, they speak
 of tenderness.

METRO AIDE

Pagmasdan mo ang iyong larawan:

Sombrero mo'y sa magsasaka
Walis mo'y sa manggagawa

T-shirt mo'y sa pamahalaan
Pantalón mo'y sa Katipunan

Baon mo'y bagay sa maralita
Sahod mo'y buhat sa Maharlika

Ngayon, kawal ng kalinisan
Sagutin mo itong katanungan:

Sino ang iyong pinaglilingkuran?

HA LONG BAY

From afar
the curtain of limestone
seems impenetrable
hostile to strangers
from other lands
lured by its promised magic

But the shimmering sea
agrees to be our gracious hostess
taking us into her embrace
underneath an unblemished sky
gently leading us
as the curtain parts

Now we see the mountains
perhaps a dozen out of two thousand
giving way as our solitary boat
slices the waters
revealing other boats
and more mountains
hiding caves
with treasures of myriad shapes
sculptured by time
colored by human eyes
which can only vaguely imagine
nature's mysterious intent

We marvel at what we see
and what we feel
as we confront
a millennial creation
we can only photograph
and cannot hope to equal
as we converse
with boat people

selling baby lobsters and clams
perfect for a quiet lunch on board
hundreds of miles away from home

Or is this home
to restless spirits seeking reassurance
in the enduring strength
of limestone mountains
or in each other's aching arms
and enjoying a rare moment of pure calm
in the company of the undulating sea?

Hanoi lies reclining

Like an aging woman
ancient but enchanting
mysterious like the lakes
on her curves
surrounded by trees kneeling
so that they can grow new roots
like hair on her silent waters
speaking of the wisdom of the centuries
through the tortoise in its tower
and temples full of incense

Hanoi's veins and arteries
begin to throb in the early morning
with bowls of rice noodles
spiced with fragrant herbs
streams of conical hats
and dancing baskets
of vendors on foot
sweaty cyclists pedal-pushing
rickety rickshaws
or revving up their new motor bikes
in the humid air
as they wind through narrow streets
lined with people sitting on their haunches
vending their wares
or young men having a public haircut
and occasional women
having a harried pedicure
passing shops selling embroidered silk
and rubber shoes
ceramic bowls and plastic plates
unmindful of ochre-colored buildings
with louvre windows of blue or green
which have seen better times

and of red banners
with hammer and sickle
and slogans from the past
emblazoned in gold

Sometimes Uncle Ho smiles down
on them from a poster or two
holding Vietnamese children
in his arms

On my fiftieth year, I feel like Hanoi
wearing my life on my face
my age on my body inevitably
donning both the peasant's conical hat
and the elegant lady's silk gown
surfing the Internet for news and mail
later inhaling the fragrance of incense
and moving on to the strange language
of a Vietnamese mass
saved by its familiar rituals
unburdening my soul
of half a century's imperfections

I smile back at Uncle Ho
whom I refuse to greet in his mausoleum
and embrace those who love me,
warts, wrinkles, and all.

HONGKONG

Every Sunday
mats unroll lives coiled up
poised for release
in a cacophony of familiar sounds
echoing those of home

It is a weekly fiesta
of exchange – self-cooked food
served up with pictures
of children and grandchildren
growing up from a distance

Mats settle uncomfortably
on rough pavement
or empty bottom
of stately buildings
still unwelcoming
after a decade or two
of mats unrolling the lives
of more than a hundred thousand
Filipinas to whom Hongkong means
working at home
but still it is not home

SHAWL WOMEN

To be rich in shawls --
To know how it is to be pampered
by lovers –gift givers
To be caressed
by remembrances of things past
To be warm, covered and guarded
against the vagaries
of current weather

How abundant are the threads
which wend their way
to form intricate webs
lush with the brilliant hues
of earth, sky and ocean
or somber and subtle
when life takes its toll
or simply changes mood

To be rich in shawls -
To relish the feel of cotton
or wool, silk or even just synthetic
Kissing the nape,
hugging the shoulders
extending to arms and hands
sometimes hiding nervous fingers
circling eager waists
reaching down to hips and thighs --
to linger there --
stretching to legs and feet
like a generous blanket
when there is none

To be rich in shawls -
To be in the circle of shawl wearers

shawl makers
shawl givers
shawl women
entwining their souls
with every shawl
offered to grace the bodies
of the blessed

Reflections

*P*oetry as Biography and Sisterhood's Tapestry

I wrote "Genesis," my first poem, when I was 18, at the height of the First Quarter Storm. Then the adventurist politics of the streets merged with romance and romanticism, and like the rest of the restless youth of those times, I thought I was invincible. Nationalism and feminism mixed like a heady brew in my much heightened consciousness, and they found expression in the ink which flowed from my oftentimes reluctant and uncertain pen. Many of my early poems were in English, and they were later translated into Filipino, consistent with the politics of language then obtaining. I now offer a few which marked my growth as a woman in the groves of Diliman, in the slums of Quezon City, in the streets of Manila, Hanoi, and Hongkong, in the clear waters of Ha Long Bay, and in the circles of shawl women -- wherever my soul chooses to settle and reflect with kindred spirits.