

Switching Metaphors

*I shall no more admit
Your constant metaphor
Of you as daring eagle
Seeking refuge
In me, your serene forest.*

*I would at times
Be the soaring eagle too and you
My peaceful grove, a haven after
An exhilarating flight.*

*What matters if now and then
One would not be a forest
For the other's eagle,
Or an eagle
For the other's forest?*

*Let us then be eagles both
And together roam
The vastness of the land,
Or let us be forests both
Each cradling in our bower
Our cherished dreams.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

Palitan ng Talinghaga

(Tagalog version of "Switching Metaphors")

*Di ko na tatanggapin pa
Ang iyong lagi't lagi nang talinghaga
Na ikaw ay mapangahas na agilang
Nagpapakupkop sa akin,
Na iyong mapayapang gubat.*

*Minsa'y nais ko ring maging
Pumapailanlang na agila at ikaw
Ang tahimik kong gubat
Sisilungan paglipas ng
Nakalalagot-hiningang paglalakbay.*

*Ano naman kung paminsan-minsan
Ang isa'y di ibig maging gubat
Para sa agila ng isa,
O kaya'y maging agila
Para sa gubat ng isa?*

*Kung gayon kapwa tayo maging agila
At magkaakbay nating baybayin
Ang kalawakan ng lupa,
O kapwa tayo maging gubat
Na nagduduyan sa ating kanlungan
Ng minimithing mga pangarap.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

At the Precipice

*Precariously she stands
At the brink of the precipice
Where beauty slowly melts
And strips her power
Over men's bated breath
At a comely face
And a supple figure.*

*The ticking countdown
To a personhood
With an essence
Other than passing beauty
Has, inexorably,
Run its course.*

*But she knows only
Has ever known only
The evanescent,
Ephemeral power
Of men's longing
For a comely face
And a supple figure.*

*Alone, gazing at
An unlying mirror,
She now contemplates
Doing a Monroe.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

Two Sides of a Mirage

*And that was what he loved
Had always loved
— A mirage.*

*For he had cast upon her
All his dreams, illusions
And set her up to be
— The goddess of his desire*

*Without probing
Into her reality
Without tasting
The salt of her being.*

But that was many moons ago...

*Now she has slipped
Even from his fantasy*

*And wishing to let go
The shell and shadow
Of substance he had never
Ever truly known*

*And needing now to scorn
To find sanctuary in his anger*

*He flips the coin
Of his mirage
And makes of her
— A caricature*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

The Chore of Beauty

1.

*For men are so filled with piety
For this jealous, fickle deity
That women offered to its altar
And goaded to its worship
Bear the grievous yoke,
The onerous chore of beauty.*

*For the cost of constant gilding,
Of ornamentation, comes not cheaply.*

*Know the barter then, the price
Of such senseless artifice,
Of beauty elaborated, always
To yield impact
To wield power, of a sort
That opens doors, or opens them more smoothly
Or, at the very least,
Makes people smile more kindly.*

*But at what price! —
In time, expense, and tedious repetition.*

*Cost of beauty paid too in grimmer coin:
In the nail-raking ire of envious rivals;
Some hate on sight! Or snub with icy distance,
Fervently wish for a basket to cover your face,
A sack to disguise your figure,
Try to flush you, exile you, away out of sight
If need be, consign you as far as the moon;*

*Would-be friendships and sisterly affection
Lost, before ever they are born.*

*Paid too in crude wolf whistles
That mock, taunt, and jeer,
Eyes that leer and stare you naked,
And too many proffered loves
Quickly unmasked as mere
Fantasies of bedroom cavortings,
Massage for sunken egos;*

*Paid thus in shallowness of regard
Before ever depth is plumbed.*

2.

*Oh, to be comfortable
In one's own skin!
And not constantly hew
To some artificial standards
Of beauty — which come and go
Like fads, fickle and arbitrary.*

*From the Renaissance figure, robust and plump
To the Twiggy figure, slim and trim
We are bloated and shrunk
According to the fashion of the day.*

*Hair, to be a mass of gorgeous curls,
As one fashion dictates, has to be ironed
To prop high as a beehive,
Style of yet another era, requires
Nightlong curlers, teasing, and a mass of spray
Then to be long and straight,
As yet another fad decrees,
Chemical stretching is the prescription,
Fussed with dryer, hairnet, mousse, oil, gel, lotions
And all sorts of concoctions.*

*And hair, thus made loony,
Being primped this way and that,
Needs further treatment still to be
As nature willed it all along,
Soft and pliant, swinging naturally and free.*

*Beauty dazzles —
Through its portals
Few dare pass.
And so many stop
Just at the gate of discovery,
Satiated by outward beauty,
Failing to dig deeper,
To uncover and unravel,
A more glorious inner beauty.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

In Crowded Buses

*Time was when
With fledgling limbs
I took uncertain steps
Towards a budding freedom
And awkwardly,
Much too self-consciously,
Stood my ground
Albeit, on wobbly feet,
As a first-class
Citizen of the world.*

*But how easily confounded
Such newfound power
That I could readily sway
With unease and dismay
At the unfamiliar spectacle
(Now fairly common)
Of men feigning sleep
While women stood at aisles
In crowded buses.*

*How reconcile
A whimsical regret
At a lost romantic chivalry
That gallantly raises woman
On a glorified pedestal
With proud and passionate refusal
To play the coquettish posturing
Of a lesser, weaker mortal?*

*Now as time smoothens
The sinuous curves*

*Of floating driftwood
And rounds immersed pebbles,
Unobstrusively, I've grown
In my meanderings*

*Along the years
Like a second skin
A laid-back feminism.*

*That serenely and assuredly
Cares not whether
Prudish brows would rise
In steep carets
Or fenced minds tremble
In their sorry cages
Should I speak my mind or act
On my convictions.*

*Nor care I whether
Women revel in men's bodies
Or in other women's bodies
And so for men with women
Or for men with men.*

*But wish simply
For human decency
That dignifies both
Giver and receiver*

*And hope only
That both healthy men
And sturdy women
Would give their seats
In crowded buses*

*For children, old folk,
And pregnant women,
For sick fellows and lame people.*

*And robust men would stand
For frail women
And robust women would stand
For frail men.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

Crowded Out Self

*No, she didn't live in a shoe
Nor was she so old
But she had so many children
That the days dragged by
One after the other
All in a tiring queue;
There was so much to do!*

*Earnestly she wished for space
Just to herself to chase
An elusive muse
A muse too easily dispelled
And made more elusive still
By a baby's squeal
Or yet another meal
To cook. Or yet another
Diaper to peel. Or yet
Another sick child to heal.*

*She could only sigh
At the laundry piled high
And the dust so thick.
There was no room —
Her life was all crowded
With the children's needs
Her husband's needs
Her parents needs
Her siblings' needs
By others' needs.*

*What tranquil space there was
Was blown apart and scattered
By the typhoons and earthquakes*

*And uprootings and upheavals
Of a turbulent life.*

*Now the little ones have grown
And still she toils. Juggling
Drudgery and mundane chores
For loved ones' needs
Far from rest and home
Battling aching joints
Fending off a swamping loneliness
And a creeping homesickness.*

*And I wonder
If the landscape of her life
And the contours of her days
Might be so changed
And her muse served
If as much as children
Husband, parent, sibling, others
She had also loved —
Herself.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

Woman: Talent and Tragedy

*They imploded by the sheer force
Of their unacknowledged genius
Like volcanoes bursting in on themselves
The Camilles and Zeldas of this world*

*The oppressive weight
Of their unfulfilled talent
Sat on their chests
Like suffocating cushions.*

*Each sought her art
With a wrenching hunger of the soul
Zelda seeking to breathe life into words
Camille, to carve beauty into stone.*

*The many filaments of their being
So keen, so alive to the world
Had captured myriad images that swam
In the eddies of their mind.
Engorged, their reservoirs clamored
For an outpouring.*

*But all society without
Deigned to see them only
As frivolous debutante, flighty wife
Fledgling apprentice, spurned mistress—
Roles too cramped
For the breadth of their talent.*

*The world perceived them only
As Muses and Galateas—
Adjuncts to their men;
Allowed them only as moons*

*To the suns of their men,
A world which could not see beyond
Their costume of
Woman.*

*Their tragedy was in being so utterly
Engulfed in their love
Consumed by their passion
Caught up in the web
Of vampire loves.*

*And though art often feeds
On the fires of passion and glows
In the crucible of love,
Their art, unsteered, was dashed
In the throes of their storms.*

*Their tragedy was they bought the lie
That they were not in themselves whole
That their art could never soar
Set sail from true centers within
So they waylaid their talent.*

*But the road
To Shakespearehood, Virginia
Is long and hard. And strewn
With sundry pitfalls.*

*Traversing this trail requires
Both roots and wings
The steeling and freeing of
Oneself. And other's cheering
All along the way.*

*For talents bloom
In one's own constant
Faith. And in society's
Acclamation.*

*Unsung, their talents festered
As tiny rivulets
Unguided home to the sea
Gather in stagnant pools.*

*Art which could not
Burst forth into the sunshine
Echoed and reechoed, darkly
In the hollows of their mind.*

*And with the explosive force
Of talent unexpressed, they imploded
Into the black hole of the insane,
Gone from themselves
Lost from the world.*

SYLVIA O. DE GUZMAN

Notes:

¹ Camille Claudel became the mistress and apprentice in sculpture of the famous French sculptor, Auguste Rodin, and was herself a gifted sculptress who had started to evolve her own artistic style. Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of the renowned writer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, was also a talented writer. Both women became insane.

² Noted writer, Virginia Woolf, asked, "Where are the women Shakespeares, Leonardos and Michaelangelos? Woman, what have you to say for yourself?".