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**Rosario de Guzman Lingat,
Ang Balabal ng Diyos/
Ang Silid ng Makasalanan**

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(Gigi Alfonso-Javier, Fatima Lasay, Vivian Limpin, and Krista Dalena). Then, there are artists like Karen Flores, Nona Garcia, Geraldine Javier, Francesa Enriquez, and Yasmin Almonte—all are young but established and all have produced consistently works that are innovative, insightful, and responsive to the times. Absent, too, are lesbian artists (Tita Lim, Lingling Ramilo, and so on). Finally, it is interesting that Filipino women working abroad are included in *Self-Portraits 2*, but the women outside Metro Manila remain marginal. *Self-Portraits 3* may bring us the voices of the women visual artists in Davao, Baguio, Cebu, Dumaguete, Iligan, and Palawan.

Nonetheless, the achievement of this book cannot be denied.

More than portraits of women as visual artists, this book shows us the face of the woman visual artist as mother, wife, lover, daughter, niece, widow, student, teacher, poet, writer, restorer, actor, performer, activist, fighter, community organizer, administrator, cultural worker, and visionary. Even if there are silences in *Self-Portraits 2*, the voices of the women resonate with passion, creativity, resilience, discipline, power, and strength.

By giving these women the opportunity to speak and be heard, *Self-Portraits 2* enriches the landscape of Philippine art history.

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Rosario de Guzman Lingat, **Ang Balabal ng Diyos/Ang Silid ng Makasalanan**. Edited by Soledad S. Reyes. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003. 197 pages

The publication in one volume of the serialized novels *Ang Balabal ng Diyos* and *Ang Silid ng Makasalan* by Rosario de Guzman Lingat is a welcome reminder to the literary establishment of the efforts not only

of Tagalog writers but also of Tagalog women writers. In her introduction to this edition of the novels, Soledad Reyes points out that the Marxist literary criticism in the Philippine academe has legitimated Tagalog novels (e.g., the works of Faustino Aguilar and Amado V. Hernandez) that deal with "serious" social issues (i.e., colonization, labor problems, feudal oppression) at the expense of the popular or commercial novels, which deal with domestic matters.

The book is a project of dual recovery. Just as Reyes rescues Lingat from being forgotten, Lingat, we discover, similarly bares our cultural amnesia to ourselves in her long neglected works, exposing the harsh realities lurking behind façades.

In *Ang Balabal ng Diyos*, Felino is an actor who uses religion and spectacle to deceive people around him. The *balabal* or veil in the title refers to the "spectacularization" inherent in religion, a form of false consciousness, which some people use to take advantage of others. The veil of Felino's tricks hides God. As in the tale of "The Emperor's New Clothes," a naïve young student sees through Felino's fraudulent schemes.

The resolution of the novel is a reversal, which adds another meaning to the title, for God is veiled in this other sense, too, that He works mysteriously. Felino survives a brain transplant, but the brain donor is a dying priest. Thus, the corrupt Felino dies and a new Felino, who has the consciousness of the priest and who is set on rectifying his ways, is born.

Fraud exists not only in societal relations but also in the personal and sexual. In the second novel, *Ang Silid ng Makasalanan*, the protagonist discovers the duplicity of the company he keeps and forgoes his own desires in order to respond to a more spiritual call. Ernie, a medical student, lives in Mrs. Luisa's boarding house. The other boarders are Pilar, Sarah, Mrs. Miranda, and Ms. Santos. Each one has secrets and bears grudges, one against another. Luisa has never forgiven Miranda for seducing her fiancée and secretly relishes the fact that Miranda lost him in the war. Luisa never marries but has a daughter by him, Sarah, whom she maltreats no matter how obedient the girl is. Ms. Santos secretly desires Ernie. Pilar, who presents herself as the wife of Chito, is actually his mistress (he is married to someone else) and works as a

prostitute. Although the characters behave civilly, their pretenses give way to a violent confrontation in the end. Ernie eventually opts to be a priest.

Lingat explores many gender issues in this novel in ways that are ahead of her time. In Luisa's character, for example, she represents women trapped in a society where their desires are limited to domestic space. Since Luisa did not become the legitimate wife, she becomes the substitute patriarch, providing for everyone's needs while remaining indifferent to all. She is like the patriarch who restricts movement. Thus, in her house, everyone has a room, which is both the physical space and a trope of containment. By using Ernie as the central consciousness, Lingat expands the notion of patriarchal victimization to include men. We see Luisa, a woman, as the victim-turned-victimizer and Ernie, a man, as the victim-turned-redeemer.

The novels, then, are articulations of protest and critique, though maybe not of the variety obvious to certain Marxist literary critics dominant at the time when Lingat wrote them. Their publication now makes it possible for contemporary readers—readers for whom resistance and critical interrogation operate in less reductive or obvert ways—to situate Lingat in the long tradition of popular discourses advocating critical intervention.

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