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Wrestling with Maria Clara: Filipino Women Poets in English, 1905–50

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> . . . I discovered that if I were going to review books I would have to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. . . . I will describe her as briefly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish . . . in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own . . . I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in court of law, would be that I acted in self-defense. Had I not killed her she would have killed me.[1]
>
> Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf here refers to Honoria, the heroine in what may have been Victorian England's most popular book of poems, Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1862). Patmore's Angel represented the ideal Victorian lady, one who in her saintly selflessness did not have a life of her own, preferring to build her entire existence around her mate.

It is easy to see why Woolf thought of the Angel as a threat to her own existence as a writer, more specifically, as a reviewer of books authored by men. No woman writer under the influence of such a phantom could possibly hope to voice her opinions with total candor. She would have to be careful not to offend the author in the least by sounding insufficiently impressed by the quality of his work, and would have to word her review in a manner that would not invite attack on her presumptuous claim to erudition. In brief, she would have to heed the Angel's whispered counsel: "Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own."

1. Woolf, "Professions for Women," in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. and with an introduction by Michelle Barrett (A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1979), pp. 58–59.

Woolf therefore argued that the initial step towards emancipating the fettered woman writer's mind was to overcome this figure created and imposed upon twentieth century consciousness by the patriarchal society of Victorian England.

Similarly, Filipino women writers during the early part of this century had to wrestle with the phantom of Maria Clara, who is less the fictional character of Rizal's novels, than the cult figure that subsequently evolved in the popular psyche as the ideal of Filipino womanhood.

In a now classic essay, Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil traces "this melancholy transformation of Maria Clara from paragon to parody,"[2] finally laying the blame not on Rizal (he apparently had never intended to present Maria Clara as an ideal[3]) but on the generation of readers coming after him who wilfully misread the character of Maria Clara:

> Had they been less sentimental and more clear-headed about Maria Clara, things would have been different. Instead of seeing Maria Clara whole, instead of admiring the woman entire, they made the mistake of idealizing her external traits. Instead of giving their attention to her strength, her nobility, her inherent stubborness, they made a cult out of her capacity for fainting and blushing.[4]

By ignoring her complexity as an individual and thus reducing her to a caricature, the cult of Maria Clara did Filipino womanhood a great disservice. It seduced her into believing that she had no claim to either her body or her mind.

In Filipino idiom, to be called Maria Clara is to be viewed as a virgin who, to protect that supreme virtue of her womanhood, must observe the most minute rituals of maidenly modesty. As though to protect herself from any male tactile advances ("Noli Me Tangere"), Maria Clara hides her body beneath the multilayered, voluminous gown that has since borne her name.

The caricature of Maria Clara also depicts her half-concealing her face behind a ubiquitous fan. In the same way that well-behaved children are to be seen but not heard, Maria Clara is expected to be a visible but inaudible presence in society. Assumed to have no thoughts of her own (thinking was after all thought to be an occupation reserved for males), she was also assumed to have no opinion to

2. Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil, "Maria Clara" in *Woman Enough and Other Essays* (Manila: Vibal Publishing House, 1963), p. 29.

3. To know what Rizal's own ideal of Filipina womanhood was, Nakpil refers readers to his famous Letter to the Young Women of Malolos. Jose Rizal, *Rizal's Unknown Writings*, trans. Juan Collas (Manila: Bookman, 1957), pp. 70–90.

4. Nakpil, *Woman Enough*, p. 33.

offer. So silenced, Maria Clara retreated behind her fan and resorted instead to the dumb language of soulful looks and stifled sighs.

Her body concealed beneath a heavy gown, her face concealed behind a fan, Maria Clara literally effaced herself from public view. More critically, she can be said to have figuratively effaced her personal identity not only from the public but also from herself.

Here then was the crux of the problem for women writers of that period. As women they were expected to efface themselves but as writers they needed to assert themselves. How then did these women poets who felt impelled to express their emerging sense of self deal with a phantom who insisted they had no self to begin with?

Many of them apparently resolved the conflict by ultimately identifying with Maria Clara and assuming her persona in their poetry. But there is evidence that a significant number of them recognized Maria Clara as the enemy who threatened (in the words of Woolf) to "pluck the heart out of [their] writing" and therefore resolved to engage her in mortal combat.[5]

What gave these women the courage to confront Maria Clara and challenge her supremacy? The critical factor may have been that these women lived during a phase of Philippine history propitious for women.[6] Unlike the young women of Malolos, the Filipinas of this period were given access to the free educational system established by the American colonial government; moreover, this system was coeducational. Boys and girls sat in the same classrooms, read the same textbooks, took the same tests and, of special significance to the study, learned the new language, English.

In this new environment, it was natural for young Filipino women of at least a certain socioeconomic class to develop a sense of self. This sense of self was steadily reinforced as Filipina graduates entered the professions of medicine, education, law, commerce and social services. In 1937 the right of suffrage was extended to Filipino women, confirming their full status as citizens.

Thought-full Filipino women of that period must have felt that the

5. The evidence for this study is based on a computer-generated random sample of 225 poems by Filipino women poets writing in English between 1900–50. This number represents approximately 25 percent of the total number of poems authored by women and listed in *Index to Filipino Poetry in English, 1905–1950*, comp. Edna Z. Manlapaz and Gemino H. Abad (Metro Manila: National Book Store, 1988). All generalizations are based on this random sample and illustrative examples are restricted to the poems so included, save one ("Filipina"); Woolf, *Women and Writing*, p. 59.

6. Of the several accounts of this period, a work of special interest is Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido, *History of the Feminist Movement in the Philippines* (Manila: National Federation of Women's Clubs, 1955).

time was right for the term "woman" to be redefined, this time not by males but by themselves. Some attempted to articulate this redefinition of woman in the rhythm and rhyme of their poetry. It is this group of poems with which the present study is engaged.

THE RELUCTANT VIRGIN

Since Maria Clara was a definition of woman imposed by patriarchal society, it was inevitable that women writers would have to wrestle with her. But to do this, they would first have to get hold of her. That meant having to knock down the towering pedestal upon which the Filipino male had put her. Over and over again, one notices in the love poetry by Filipino male poets of the period a proliferation of images that confirm this tendency to apotheosize the Filipino woman.

The avowed intention of these poems is to exalt woman but the effect is often the opposite. The following poem is a case in point.

"A Poem for Nenita"[7]

From your silence I know
It is your ardent wish
That you,
Who in my memory
Has dwelt so long,
Be now exiled.

Your wish is done.
But out of the tattered ruins
Of my deserted memory,
I erect for you a shrine

In a sacred chamber
Of my heart. I keep you there as its Virgin
And there you shall reside
In exile
Forever.

The speaker has long convinced himself of his loved one's divinity and despite her resistance, pledges to continue worshipping her. For her part, the woman wishes to be freed, not so much from his presence, but from his "memory," in which she has "dwelt so long." Perhaps this wish springs from the realization that she is trapped within his mind, in his rigid preconceptions of her. She may want

7. Amado Mauleon, "A Poem for Nenita," *The Sunday Tribune*, 2 September 1934, p. 20.

him to forget whom he thinks she is, for she is no longer that, perhaps never was, and now wishes to be true to herself.

What calls our attention here is that the shrine is dedicated not to a pagan goddess such as Aphrodite, but to Mary; moreover, not to Mary as Mother of God but as Virgin. The choice of icon confirms the obsessive premium the Filipino traditionally places on a woman's virginity. Never mind that she may not in fact be a virgin. He decrees the specific icon she is to be: "I keep you there as its Virgin."

The irony of course is that while ostensibly paying woman homage as a goddess, the male speaker in fact treats her as a slave. By placing woman in a shrine, he fixes her in a specific spot, traps her within a narrow space; by so immobilizing her, he deprives her of freedom. In fact, if not by intention, the final lines of the poem sound like the pronouncement of an immutable life sentence:

> And there you shall reside
> In exile.
> Forever.

If a woman is to be true to her role as Virgin, or at least appear to be, she is assured of her place on top of the pedestal man erects for her. Conversely, for a woman to put her virginity under suspicion is to give man reason to pull the pedestal from under her feet.

In Alfredo Litiatco's "Beyond Recall," woman is cautioned that a single offense against the patriarchal code of female purity could mean her total fall from grace:

> When I remarked in quiet transport on
> Your mirrored beauty, wantonly you tossed
> A pebble from the bank we sat on.
> In troubling thus the tranquil pool, we lost
> The fair reflections on your fairer face
> That in its gleaming liquid bosom lay
> And woke the dormant filth to take the place
> Of all the loveliness you drove away.
>
> So may one act, unseemly and perverse,
> Of course, suffice to be a grievous blot
> Upon your image in my heart. Or worse,
> The pool assailed regains its peace, but not
> The virgin faith of worshippers, once shaken
> You lose your dream forever when you waken.[8]

8. Alfredo Litiatco, "Beyond Recall" *With Harp and Sling*, (Manila: Effandem, 1943), p. 22.

It is not clear just what the presumably male speaker is referring to when he speaks of the "pebble" he accuses the woman of "wantonly" tossing into the pool but we can guess from its alleged effects — "unseemly and perverse"—that it has to do with woman's exercise of her sexuality.

Note first of all that the speaker is preoccupied not with reality but with the appearances of things: he speaks of her *"mirrored* beauty," "fair *reflection,"* and her *"image* in his heart." This explains why his first objection to her behavior is that it is "unseemly," i.e., her demeanor does not appear appropriate to his image of her. Even more important, note that what he condemns as "perverse" cannot be woman's sexuality per se for he concedes that there must be beneath that pool of pure water a base of earth. But his male bias betrays him when he refers to that bottom not as earth but as "filth."

At this point a Freudian interpretation of the poem is inevitable, the concave-shaped pool being symbolic of female genitalia. What the poem reveals then is the male speaker's refusal to regard female sexuality as other than "filth," filth that must remain at the bottom of the pool and under no circumstances (except perhaps by his own doing, not hers) be allowed to surface.

Man's illusion of woman as pure must remain intact at all costs, otherwise she must pay a heavy price: the loss of her "dream," which, in his male vanity, he sees as her possession of him. His final word of warning is telling: once shaken, his "virgin faith" can never be whole again. His choice of words is a stern reminder that his faith is as fragile and irretrievable as her virginity.

The poems "A Poem for Nenita" and "Beyond Recall" illustrate how man persists in his illusion regarding woman. It became the lifelong task of Maria Clara to make man secure in this illusion. But what of the woman who values her freedom, and who rejects the roles assigned her by man as she searches for her authentic self? Juana Wilson's "Pineapples in Bloom" is a rhapsodic account of that journey into self.[9]

Today I climbed about the hill on just the hopeful chance
To learn the crimson promises of many piña plants.
They live like sturdy spinsters in still grey green restraint
One could not call them whispy, and one could not call them quaint.
They neighbor in their own sharp way with all the verdure
of the hill;
And never envy other plants their opulence of chlorophyll

9. Juana Wilson, "Pineapples in Bloom" *Philippine Magazine,* 31 July 1938, p. 331.

It's my delight to see, deep in the gorgeous, secret part,
Each holds a blazing, carmine love within her cloistered heart

From a distance, woman sees herself as neither "whispy" nor "quaint." In terms of color she describes this dullness as "still grey green," unlike other forms of creation blessed with chlorophyll. She catches sight, however, of the "crimson promises" discernible in the plant's spindly leaves. She is intrigued by this progress in color, and is "hopeful" that an investigation into the pineapple's real nature will not be disappointing. She approaches the fruit and peers into its core. Here she discovers a "blazing, carmine love" in its "gorgeous, secret part," alluding to the dormant passion that has been thrust to the recesses of woman's consciousness. Instead of being ashamed of her sexuality, the woman is "delighted" at her find, and subtly enjoins other women to bolt out of their presumably male-designed cloisters, to make similar journeys into their own "gorgeous, secret parts," and discover within themselves the sexual dimension which confirms that they are, after all, gloriously alive.

PROTESTING THE PATRIARCHAL CODE

Woman's discovery of this inert passion within herself makes it natural for her to want to share the passion with a mate. In Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido's "Subterfuge", the woman complains of the severity of the Code framed by the patriarchal society of the Philippines, specifically of the period.[10]

If only, Love, the code within these lands
Allowed all impulse to govern the heart
We should not feel this fever of the hands
To leap the gap that keeps us so, apart;
We should not know denial of a kiss
Nor let our speech on cautious lips to die:
But since the Code is as severe as this,
Come, cheat we thus the curious passer-by;
Each sit beyond the other's finger tips
Quietly, quietly – but all the while,
The discreet space between your lips, my lips,

Spanned by the kisses carried on our smile . . .
Oh, in this sphere of forced secrecy,
How close we! How more alone, how free!

10. Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido, "Subterfuge" in *Two Voices* (Manila: The Manila Post Publishing Co., 1945), p. 19.

The speaker blames society for repressing the "fever of (their) hands, for causing them to "deny (themselves) a kiss, for censoring even their "speech," which "dies on cautious lips". . . She does not, however, dare openly disobey the Code. The most she agrees to do is to get around that Code: "Come, cheat . . ." But what is remarkable here is that it is the woman who initiates the action, makes the first move.

The persona in Toribia Maño's "Tambourines in My Heart" is even more aggressive.[11] Like a gypsy, she is contemptuous of the mold of lifelessness in which man insists on confining her. She is impatient with man's awed adoration of her, and demands to be loved as a person:

You should not be sitting there looking at me
As if I were the shadow of your face
Or the light suddenly gone out of a star
Or a pale white meadow
There are many things to think about:
You should not be sitting there and looking at me
As if I could not stir.

. . . .

You should not be sitting there looking at me.
You should be holding me and kissing my mouth.

From the start she establishes herself as a person in her own right, not merely the "shadow of (his) face." She is flesh and blood, not an idealized abstraction like "the light suddenly gone out of a star." Moreover, she feels no gratitude towards those who measure her worth only in terms of her supposed purity, for in so doing they close their eyes to her other possibilities, and in effect deprive her of her rightful color, just as a normally lush-green meadow is painted "pale white." She is, she would have him know, "many things" other than what he may think of her. In this case, what she wants him to "think about," is the fact of her being a sexual being.

I look at myself wanting you.
Wanting the fragrance of your body, the taste of your mouth
that is honey and fruit and incense,
The warmth of your flesh that is the ripeness of mangosteens
and goldenness of mangoes,
Wanting the sound of your footsteps that is approaching
music of many tambourines –

11. Toribia Maño, "Tambourines in my Heart" in *Heart of the Island: An Anthology of Philippine Poetry in English*, ed. Manuel A. Viray (Manila: University Publishing Co., Inc., 1947), pp. 54–57.

Her longing for him is expressed in explicit sensual images, signifying that she has paid close attention to the wealth of her senses and has finely tuned them to his disturbing maleness. Her use of the word "want" is a breakthrough in female self-expression, for by this she not only acknowledges, but asserts her own sexuality.

All this seething ardor notwithstanding, however, the woman does not reach out and grab the exasperatingly hesitant male. While she declares that she in fact can "stir," she still asks him to make the first crucial move, a clear case of concession to traditional male prerogative.

The personas in Subido's and Maño's poems make gestures of resistance to the patriarchal code but they do not in fact oppose it. In political terms, they might be said to seek reform but choose to remain within the system. They are not as yet prepared to revolutionize ("to turn about") the sexual politics of their time.

For that, we need to look at the poems of Angela Manalang-Gloria, many of which openly challenge and defy Codes, both human and divine.[12]

In "The Moral Is," she shocks the reader by seeming to preach the merits of sin.[13]

Pity the shining choirs of angels!
    They can not know so much as I
Who in the cycle of a moment
    Can surely live and as surely die,

Who, between sin and whitened virtue.
    Choose to play the Jezebel,
Knowing that heaven is twice heaven
    Only to those who once knew hell.

Rather than be an angel, she prefers to be a mortal. For while angels have, for all eternity, a disembodied existence, she has at least this "splendid cycle of a moment" to experience life as a sexual being. As though the statement of preference weren't enough, Manalang-Gloria identifies the mortal as Jezebel, the biblical character whose name has since become synonymous with that of a woman abandoned and estranged by society because of her sexual sins. (IV Kings 9: 22)

It is imperative to point out however that the speaker in this poem makes the choice not between good and evil but between two evils—

12. Manalang-Gloria is represented in this sample by thirty-four poems. Her most revolutionary poem, not included in this survey, is explicitly titled "Revolt from Hymen" in *Poems* (Manila, 1940), p. 106.

13. Angela Manalang-Gloria, "The Moral Is," *Poems*, p. 93.

"sin and whitened virtue." The epithet "whitened"—a clear allusion to Christ's own censure of Pharaisaical hypocrisy—makes it clear that the speaker refuses to equate virginity *per se* with virtue. (Matthew 23: 27).

Whether covert, cautious, agressive, or scandalously overt, the affirmation of woman as a sexual being is expressed in the female-authored poetry of the era. That affirmation, though, is confined to only a relatively few poems. What may have inhibited the other women poets in the free expression of their sexuality is the same fear confessed by Virginia Woolf, that of "telling the truth about [her] own experience *as a body*. . . . (italics ours).[14]

A similar fear must have been felt by Filipino women writers of that period during which the influence of Maria Clara was still very pervasive. Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido explores this particular predicament of woman in her poem "Filipina," the title of which suggests that the persona is speaking not just of herself but of all native women.[15]

You wonder why my feelings
For you, my love, are sung.
And never plainly phrased by
The unaffecting tongue.
It is because my passions
Are restless, rash, and strong -
To native sense immodest
Unless expressed in song.

I have made Speech and Song,
I have tried Silence, too.
But all interpret ill the thoughts
My heart would speak to you.

A motion of the hand, perhaps,
Half-wanton, half-witholding,
And such a smile, and such a glance,
Would best be love's unfolding -
Meaning that while my sentiments
Have need of more than word,
I dare not by a brazen move,
Displease you, Lord.

Here woman confesses to passions that are "restless, rash, and strong." She aches to express herself, and at this point silence will no

14. Woolf, *Women and Writing*, p. 62.
15. Tarrosa-Subido, "Filipina," p. 8.

longer do. She would like to communicate through physical gestures: "a motion of the hand, . . . a smile, . . . a glance," but is held back for fear that the man that she holds in such high esteem ("my lord") might think her "brazen."

She has "need of more than word," but even her access to word is limited. She tries plain speech ("plainly phrased by the unaffecting tongue") but such straightforwardness sounds "immodest to native sense." Her only recourse then, is poetry ("unless expressed in song"), since literary conventions of the lyric allow for rhetorical excess and poetic license. Ironically, it is this same convention that is likely to have male readers mistake for mere convention what may be for the woman writer real passion.

LIFE AFTER LOVE

The most unfortunate of all Maria Clara's legacies, according to Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil, is her attitude of masochism.

> Because of Maria Clara millions of Filipinos learned to enjoy suffering and humiliation. They took up their crosses and followed her to the apotheosis of romantic sanctification. . . . They denied themselves every kind of joy, wallowed in self-pity, gorged themselves on their delicious miseries. . . . Maria Clara made a talent for unhappiness her greatest virtue.[16]

A survey of the poetry by women during this period which deals with lost love and aborted romances tends to confirm this view. Most of the poems show woman blaming herself for the ended love affair; she readily forgives her former lover, even in the event that it is she who is the aggrieved party, and promises to pray for him; in either case, she prepares herself for a lifetime of abject misery. Antonia Ocampo-Bautista's "Dedication" is typical of such poems:

> To you, my Lover, I dedicate the loneliness of my
> Life.
> Time flows and day trails after another day
> Yet still my heart never knew the happiness that it
> waits to command.
> Ah, Beloved, my thoughts have always found you
> in all your ways.
>
> The dew has fallen with propitious softness,
> And the nights are cinctured by bright winds.
> Lily flowers and camia blossoms have silvered the
> streams and bedecked the land,

16. Nakpil, *Woman Enough*, p. 34.

And in the sad resignation of forlorn hope,
I long for the smoulder of fallen roses in the
effluvia of outlined minutes.

But then those were only chequered shadows,
And my dreams are fallen petals on the water
of hopelessness
I call for you, but the perfume that comes
from your soul is vague and suffering,
And I find only the puerility of a tear painfully
beautiful through the afterglow of restlessness.

To you, my Lover, I dedicate the frailty of my songs.
Songs woven under our lyric moon
But hurtingly lonelied in the limbo of my yearning soul
For soul speaks through soul;
So I dedicate the loneliness of my Life to you! . . .[17]

Here the speaker practically luxuriates in her grief. She uses nature as a dramatic backdrop for her loneliness: "dew falling with propitious softness," "nights cinctured by bright winds," "lily flowers and camia blossoms silvering the streams and bedecking the land," etc. She registers no intention to ever recover from the pain—"sad resignation of forlorn hope," "my dreams are fallen petals on the water of hopelessness." The reader even suspects that she takes pride in her suffering—"I find only the puerility of a tear painfully beautiful through the afterglow of restlessness." She "dedicates the loneliness of her life" to her lover, and by this statement she confers upon her grief a stamp of permanence.

The substantial number of poems such as this reinforces the popular impression that woman's response to lost love is to fall apart so completely that life after love is virtually impossible.

Man on the other hand is generally credited with the ability to survive romantic disappointment through a deliberate process of healing which Gregorio Estonanto explores in his poem "Afterthought."[18]

Yes, it was better that before
Fulfillment came the parting and you bade
Me go my way. For days 'tis true I wore
The cloak of sorrow; grieving that I had
To burn your image shrin'd within my heart.

17. Antonia Ocampo-Bautista, "Dedication" *Philippine Herald Midweek Magazine*, 21 February 1934, p. 23.
18. Gregorio Estonanto, "Afterthought" *Graphic*, 30 March 1934, p. 41.

But when resentment to fair reason gave
Way and the tortured feelings ceased to smart
I knew 'twas the best and I had to be brave.

The speaker claims that it is because man is blessed with fair reason that he is able to keep his emotions in check, limit his sadness to a number of days, and on the whole be sensible about the unhappy turn of events; in short, he is able to *take it like a man,* an idiomatic expression which means "to confront with courage."

"To take it like a man" is an example of how the language of a patriarchal society is biased in favor of the males. What equivalent idiom is there in implicit praise of a woman who, in the aftermath of an affair, uses her reason and prudence to keep from falling apart, and to go ahead with her life?

There are, in fact, a number of poems in the sample which show woman intent on finding life after love. The persona in Lina Javier's "Testimonial," for example, makes the laudable if feeble attempt to resist the onslaught of grief:

Let this pitiful laughter
be testimonial
Of *brittle* nonchalance
in trial.[19]

Her laughter is pitiful, for it is obviously inauthentic, and to the world there is hardly a sight more pathetic than a woman jilted. Her "*brittle* nonchalance" is likely to soon cave in, but this brief pretense is already a major gesture of courage for a woman who in most other instances effaces herself.

Feigned strength is likewise employed as a defense measure in Araceli Neri's "I Wonder Why":

Yet I shall now resolve to drown the
canker and the pain
Beneath the cloak of cool disdain![20]

Although her composure is admittedly a "cloak," it is not tentative like that described in the earlier poem. Here the woman "resolves" not to allow pain to overcome her. It is a deliberate exercise of the will. When she speaks of "drown(ing)" the "canker and the pain," she intends finality of resolution. She assures the reader that she is determined to see the charade through.

19. Lina Javier, "Testimonial," *The Philippine Collegian,* 17 September 1940, p. 5.
20. Araceli M. Neri, "I Wonder Why," *The Sunday Tribune,* 8 September 1935, p. 19.

Grim resolution is a frequent response, but other alternatives have been raised, as in Florencia Mercado's "Eventide."[21] Here the woman also masks her emotions, but this time she takes an almost malicious pleasure in this opportunity to role-play.

Good that you've come
At eventide
To me:

I break
My vow to thee
In jealous tears;
Here is your ring
And you are free.

But if you feel
You have to part with it
Take it nowhere except the pawnshop
Across the street.

And after tomorrow?
You may come back.
For you might find me
Waiting.

But go now from me, at eventide
I do not want you back.

The speaker in a fit of jealousy returns her lover's ring and sets him "free." After this tearful speech, however, she immediately issues the following confusing restriction: "Take it nowhere except the pawnshop/Across the street." With calculated kindness she then tosses her lover a golden chance:

And after tomorrow?
You may come back
For you might find me
waiting

There are naturally no guarantees. Another day of anxiety for her offender is pleasant revenge. Before he even begins to consider himself as even mildly successful, she makes certain he gets her point: "But go now from me, at eventide/I do not want you back."

The point, of course, is that she is in charge. Her imperatives are carefully arranged to achieve the desired effect, and do not therefore seem to be a mere manifestation of ficklemindedness. In all probabil-

21. Florencia Mercado, "Eventide," *The Philippine Collegian*, 9 July 1948, p. 11.

ity she knows exactly what she wants, but chooses not to tell him directly.

While this particular persona keeps her options open, the woman in Manalang-Gloria's "Wisdom" is not as receptive to the idea of falling in love again.[22] Having been disappointed, she now declares that love is overrated and not worth her time. To be wise, she cynically concludes, is to have arrived at this realization.

When I was young and sixteen
    I thought the world well lost
For love that like a standard
    Led all the shining host.

Now that I've grown to wisdom
    And seen how loves are furled
Like all discarded banners
    I'd rather have the world.

There is much more to life, one gathers, than making a comic heroine of oneself by bearing the "standard" of inane love. Woman can exist apart from man and find fulfillment in a host of other possibilities— a degree, a career, a cause . One must adopt an attitude towards life that is practical instead of absurdly romantic.

This woman, however, seems to dismiss love too easily, making the reader suspect that beneath her flippant lines lies a deeper distress that, instead of coming to terms with, she convinces herself does not exist.

Perhaps the most adult reaction to failed love is detailed in Juana Flores' "The End," a poem that maintains a realistic balance between grief and resolution.[23]

I locked your letters up today
In a box of hammered brass,
With a faded flow'r from each bouquet,
Ah, I was a foolish lass.

Then in my hands I cupped my dreams
And held them to my heart -
I pray it's best, if fate so deems
That you and I must part.

So I placed my heart . . . some songs
    . . . a smile

22. Manalang-Gloria, "Wisdom," p. 88.
23. Juana Flores, "The End," *Philippines Free Press*, 28 May 1938, p. 57.

In a box most tenderly
And when I'd wept a little while
I slowly turned the key.

She does not hurl his letters into a gothic fire, but locks them up in a box of hammered brass together with some faded flowers. Alluding to a funeral, she calmly and unwaveringly buries the past while she stays alive. She accepts that she was "foolish," but as a "lass" she was entitled to some degree of immaturity. She "prays it's best," finding strength in religious conviction. Their separation was "deemed by fate," so she bears no bitterness towards her lover and doesn't blame herself either. Although she was "foolish" the affair is not something she regrets, for it did bring her some of life's cheapest, most exquisite pleasures: "some songs, a smile . . ." She "weeps a little," according ended romance its rightful degree of sorrow. When she "turns the key," however, she formally ends her period of mourning and signifies a readiness to move on to other things.

Is there life after love? While Maria Clara's contemporaries seemed to confirm what Lord Byron once observed of love, that "while it is of man's life only a part, 'tis woman's whole existence," this survey shows that quite a number of women in the early part of the twentieth century were beginning to consider other possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Of the male-authored poems included in the random sample and relevant to this study, approximately 60 percent apotheosized the Filipina as someone with the purity of an angel and the selflessness of a martyr. Most of the remaining poems condemn her as a male-devouring she-devil. These statistics merely confirm what is predictable of literature in a patriarchal society, namely, the operation of the so-called "virgin/whore syndrome."

What does come as a surprise is that approximately 60 percent of the female-authored poems tend to view woman neither as angelic nor devilish but as a human vulnerable to the seduction of both lust and love.

Reading the female-authored poetry of the period from a distance of nearly fifty years, one senses among these poems an unmistakable feeling of restiveness. Women—some of them, certainly—were beginning to raise pivotal questions about themselves; questions that in effect challenged the myth of "The Filipina."

> The Filipina as myth . . . must cling, but never badger. She must be humble and modest to the point of self-effacement. . . . She must be the custodian of all the goodness in the world. A man's a man and therefore mostly devil, but a woman has no right to be anything but a saint and an angel.[24]

The Filipina-as-myth is Maria Clara and it is with her phantom that some Filipina poets of the first half of the century had to wrestle. Pinning her to the ground, however, was only the beginning of a long, protracted struggle towards actual self-knowledge, as Virginia Woolf discovered after she herself had killed the Angel in the House.[25]

> The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object — a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is "herself"? I mean, what is a woman?

It is a question which every generation of women must answer for themselves.

24. Nakpil, "Myth and Reality" in *Woman Enough*, p. 23.
25. Woolf, *Women and Writing*, p. 60.