

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints

Volume 39 | Number 3

Article 3

5-22-2012

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Recommended Citation

Pagsanghan, Stella (2012) "Angela Manalang Gloria: The Writer and Her Milieu," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*: Vol. 39: No. 3, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.4945>

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies/vol39/iss3/3>

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philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 39, no. 3 (1991): 303–320

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Angela Manalang Gloria: The Writer and Her Milieu

STELLA PAGSANGHAN

You shall not forget, for I am past forgetting.¹

An imperious presence first made itself felt in *The Literary Apprentice* in 1928. It was the presence of Angela Manalang Gloria who was to display all through her life a powerful sense of self, a lean, iron spirit that would conquer illness, the death of a husband, the devastation of war. In an era of experimentation with English, Manalang Gloria's verses showed complete mastery of the language. At a time when students fought for membership in the U.P. Writers' Club, she remained distant and contemptuous of its members. In an era of sexual taboos, she wrote hymns to Hymen. In an era burning with nationalist fever, her poetry was intensely private and personal.

THE EARLY YEARS: 1907-24 *

Angela Caridad Manalang was born on 2 August 1907 in Guagua, Pampanga, to Felipe Manalang and Tomasa Legaspi, the eldest in what was to be a brood of eleven.² Constant travelling marked her early childhood. Finally, in 1914, when she was about ten, the Manalang family chose to reside in Albay.

The young Manalang Gloria exhibited early signs of a defiant stubbornness. Passionately devoted to dolls in her early childhood, she spurned the classroom in favor of their companionship, skipping classes

The title is adapted from Doreen Fernandez and Edilberto Alegre, eds., *The Writer and His Milieu: An Oral History of First Generation Writers in English* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1984).

1. Angela Manalang Gloria, "To a Lost One," *The Literary Apprentice* (U.P. Writers' Club, 1928), p. 4.

2. Interview with Angela Manalang Gloria, Premier Hotel, Manila, 20 January 1985. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent information is taken from this interview.

to ramble in the fields with them. So total was her belligerent neglect of school that she had to repeat grades one and two.

Then she discovered books. These she "ravished by the censored score," devouring an entire local library in Legaspi by the time she turned eleven.³ "I was crazy about reading," she recounts, "the day would not be complete without finishing one book." Her academic career then took a somersault. Literally memorizing her textbooks, the two-time failure of St. Agnes Academy became a consistent honor student, eventually graduating valedictorian of her class in 1921. Apparently, even at a young age, Manalang Gloria was intensely, undividedly, her own person. When school did not coincide with her interests, she defied the system entirely. And when it did, she became its model alumna.

At twelve or fourteen, Manalang Gloria began corresponding with American children, whose addresses she took from a children's magazine called *Playmate*. Thus the English which she learned at school and from books she put to good practice.

High school in St. Agnes Academy in Legaspi and later in St. Scholastica's College in Manila was also filled with books. She read Tennyson, Longfellow, Gray—"the sainted bards of the classroom shelves." In high school, poems were already trickling out of her hands—mostly school exercises. As early as 1923, when she was sixteen, one of these exercises broke into print, appearing, interestingly enough, in a magazine called *Woman's Outlook*. Unfortunately, this magazine is no longer available today.⁴

Then a new interest surfaced: music, which "like delirium burned my days."⁵ She begged to be allowed to take piano lessons under Filomena Gloria and later in Manila, under Sr. Baptista Battig, who headed the music department in St. Scholastica's College. The piano continued to play a major role in Manalang Gloria's life.

Summer vacations, however, were spent in an entirely different occupation. Felipe Manalang put his daughter to work as *capataz* of some fifty laborers in his coconut farm in Tabaco. She and her sister supervised "the harvesting of coconut, the copra making, the ground cleaning. The laborers used to say that it was better when the *señor* was watching them, because the *señorita* was very, very strict. They had to work nonstop from eight o'clock to twelve noon, and from one

3. The phrase is taken from Manalang Gloria's poem "Change" in *Poems* (Manila: By the Author, 1940), p. 31.

4. A.E. Litiatco, "Practical Poetess," *Graphic*, 5 June 1941, p. 61.

5. From the poem "Change," *Poems* (1940), p. 31.

o'clock to five o'clock, then they stopped . . . My sister and I used to climb tall trees, and watch them from there. They could not loaf."⁶

A recluse even then, Manalang Gloria did not share her sisters' fondness for parties and socials, preferring instead the company of her poets, her piano and her thoughts.

Graduating with honors in 1925, and armed with an ardent passion for books, poetry and music, she had laid the groundwork for what was to be an exceptional career as a college student, and as a poet.

POETRY AND THE U.P.: 1925-29

They call us fools! —the lowing herd
That never yet rang out a word

Vibrant with light like you and me
Who conjugate infinity!⁷

Manalang-Gloria entered the University of the Philippines in June 1925. The U.P. was then an emerging center for literary activity in English in the Philippines. The university's *College Folio*, (The maiden issue was published in 1910) was the very first literary publication for Filipino writers in English. *The Philippine Collegian*, which in 1921 succeeded the *College Folio* as the weekly campus magazine and then newspaper, likewise became a major venue for writers' initial attempts.⁸ Later, the U.P. Writers' Club was born and through *The Literary Apprentice*, spearheaded the literary movement in English, producing from among its ranks such figures as Jose Garcia Villa, Arturo Rotor, S.P. Lopez, Loreto Paras-Sulit, Amador Daguio, C.V. Pedroche, Paz Latorena, among others.

The U.P. that Manalang Gloria entered was a world in literary ferment. It was a period of heady romance with the colonial language. Writers, eager to express themselves in the newly acquired tongue, wrote in exuberant English, the adolescent excesses of which many of them were later to recall with embarrassment. It was a generation "drunk with words," as Arturo Rotor put it.⁹ This fascination with English extended even beyond the confines of the U.P. As Rotor recounts, "At that time, all of us, the *nation*, wanted to study

6. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 52.

7. "In Defense of Poets," in *Poems* (1950), p. 252.

8. Gemino H. Abad and Edna Z. Manlapaz, eds., *Man of Earth: An Anthology of Filipino Poetry and Verse From English 1905 to the Mid-50s* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press), pp. 247, 248, 252.

9. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 200.

English."¹⁰ Thus writers in the new language found hospitable publishers, and a public which consumed even juvenalia. Editors of national newsmagazines even courted manuscripts, Rotor recalls. Loreto Paras-Sulit and Casiano Calalang, then the young masters in the short story, claim that none of their manuscripts were ever rejected for publication.¹¹ Remuneration was also quite generous.

Moreover, Doreen Fernandez and Edilberto Alegre document a warm and spirited camaraderie among the writers of the time.¹² Holed up in the office of the *Philippine Collegian*, or at the store owned by Loreto Paras' family, they traded books, engaged in lively exchanges on style, technique and the latest literary trends, and of course "criticized mercilessly each others' works."¹³ They were a prestigious and pampered coterie, making news with their latest literary forages and debates.

Although a poem of hers called "Angelita" appeared in *The Sunday Tribune Magazine* in 1925, Manalang Gloria had initially entertained no thoughts of seriously pursuing a writing career upon entering U.P. She enrolled in Preparatory Law, being persuaded by her father that law was where the money was. But her life was to take an abrupt turn when she enrolled in C.V. Wickers' English I class in her sophomore year. Wickers was supposedly the strictest faculty member in the English department at that time. His reputation as a "crank" made students avoid his classes. Apparently, Manalang Gloria was undaunted. Once, Wickers assigned his class a theme on the ocean. Manalang Gloria's work returned to her with a note scribbled at the bottom: "This is pure poetry." Upon Wickers' advice, she shifted to the English course in her sophomore year.¹⁴

Shortly after that, Manalang Gloria's poem "Sketches," a lyrical rendering of little nature scenes, won a prize in the 1926 literary contest conducted by the student council. The poem saw multiple publication, appearing in *The Philippine Collegian*, twice in *The Sunday Tribune Magazine* (24 January and 7 March 1926) and once in *The Philippines Herald Midweek Magazine* (4 April 1926).¹⁵

10. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. From a page of *Philippinesian* 1931, reproduced in Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*.

14. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 51.

15. A listing of Manalang Gloria's published works, their dates and venues of publication is provided in Edna Z. Manlapaz and Gemino H. Abad, comps., *Index to Filipino Poetry in English 1905-1950* (Metro Manila: National Bookstore, 1988), pp. 365-76.

Manalang Gloria then ventured on longer lyrical pieces, penning "Starlight Fantasy" and "Arabesque Dream," both of which saw print in the *Philippines Herald Midweek Magazine* (1 May and 6 June 1926 respectively).

When C.V. Wickers left for abroad in 1927, Manalang Gloria turned to George Pope Shannon for guidance. For these two professors she has the fondest words: "To these two Americans I owe my faith in myself that has kept me writing all these years."¹⁶

In 1927, the prestigious U.P. Writers' Club was formed, an event heralded with much solemnity by the members themselves:

We the students of the Philippines, being impelled by a noble aim to elevate to the highest possible pedestal of possible perfection the English language in the Islands, have hereby assembled ourselves to form a literary organization to be known as the Writers' Club of the University of the Philippines.¹⁷

Its founders, according to the *Literary Apprentice*—its official organ which first came out in December 1927—were Arturo Rotor, Jose Garcia Villa, Augusto Catanjal, Jose M. Hernandez, Casiano T. Calalang, Loreto Paras, Paz Latorena, Felicidad Dani, Gabriel Tuason, Eugenio E. Santos, Carmelo Jamias, Vicente del Fierro, Francisco B. Icasiano, Francisco Tonogbanua, and Angela Manalang Gloria.¹⁸

Manalang Gloria, however, today states that she never even applied for membership in the Club. She claims that her name was probably tacked on to the list of members, to boost the Club's reputation. Her name has been associated with the Club ever since, although she claims she never attended a single meeting of its members. She was, in fact, rather contemptuous of them, speaking of their arrogance with biting sarcasm in "Young Writers' Party":¹⁹

Only to suckling babes is this ever given:
To shake
Between jingle of glasses and twinkle of laughter
The rattle of adolescent wit
And imagine the clatter thereof—
As the thunder of olympian gods.²⁰

Contemporaries remember her as a recluse. Rotor recalls that she boarded at the Philippine Women's University. "That is why she didn't

16. Litiatco, "Practical Poetess," p. 60.

17. Abad and Manlapaz, *Man of Earth*, p. 253.

18. *The Literary Apprentice* (U.P. Writers' Club), 31 December 1927, p. 1.

19. Not all her poems are posited as autobiographical.

20. Angela Manalang Gloria, "Young Writers' Party," *Poems* (1940), p. 79.

have much contact with the rest . . . And then she was not much of a party goer."²¹ Luis Dato, also a poet at the University, and incidentally one of Manalang Gloria's favorite writers among her contemporaries, quotes his brother Rodolfo: "As a poet, she was a revelation; as a woman, she was a mystery."²²

Manalang Gloria did not move among the prestigious circle of the U.P. Writers' Club. She occasionally discussed poetry with Paz Latorena, Loreto Paras and Evangeline Guerrero. However, for the most part, she sought the company of her close friends only: Soledad Lacson in her sophomore year, Anita Villa in her junior year, and Consuelo Ammen in her senior year.

But while she refused to be part of the literary circles, she nevertheless shared their enthusiasm for writing. In fact, Maria Luna Lopez, also with the U.P. Writers' Club, says that Manalang Gloria was, among her contemporaries in poetry, "the most effective writer."²³

She was a prolific student poet, scribbling late into the night while in bed at the dormitory. Several new pieces appeared in *The Philippines Herald Magazine* in 1927: "Forgive Me" (26 June), "Nocturne" (3 July), "The Aesthete" (24 July), "Forgotten" (28 August), "Ten P.M." (4 September), "Mood in Silver: The Waterfall Bride" (18 September), "To a Mestiza" and "On Your Coming" (25 September), "At the Closing of the Door" (16 October), "Kin," "A Sigh in the Dark," "The Closed Heart" (30 October), and "The Call of the Ocean" (4 December).

"Yellow Moon," which later became quite popular, also appeared in the *Philippines Herald Magazine* on 9 October 1927 after having initially seen print in the *Philippine Collegian*. (Copies are no longer available. We only have her word that it did appear in the *Collegian*.) It was this piece which inspired one luckless Baltazar Villanueva, also an aspiring poet, to write her a love letter, which she spitefully described as "gaudily decorated with birds and flowers."²⁴ Mortally offended by what she considered a base advance, she summoned him, scolded him severely, and in her wrath, proceeded to write the poem "Hate," which subsequently appeared in the *Collegian*, in the *Philippines Herald Magazine* (22 January 1928) and in her 1940 collection of poems. "Ay nalintikan na Baltazar Villanueva na yan—how I hated him!" she passionately recounts. "I looked at him as if I was looking at a leper."²⁵

Not all of her admirers, however, were so vigorously spurned. Far

21. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 207-8.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

25. *Ibid.*

more fortunate was Celedonio P. Gloria, then senior law student, who was later to become Angela Manalang's husband. As luck would have it, she became the *Collegian's* literary editor for 1926-27, her term coinciding with his as the *Collegian's* editor-in-chief. Nothing could have been more congenial for romance. Celedonio Gloria was no stranger to verse writing, having penned a few pieces himself in the *Collegian*: "The Lover's Missive" (10 October 1922), "Symbols" (15 September 1923) and "Echoes" (15 February 1924). When he proposed to Manalang Gloria over the telephone, she asked him why he had not chosen a prettier, more outgoing woman. He replied, in an appropriate choice of strategy, that he was smitten by her poetry. They were engaged by Manalang Gloria's junior year.

This engagement had Rotor (Manalang Gloria's childhood friend—they used to play piano duets together) barging into her dormitory one Sunday afternoon, asking her "Is it true?" and then leaving, saying "I wish I were in the depths of hell!"²⁶

"But the Western Stars" and "To A Lost One"—the poems for which Manalang Gloria is most remembered, had their maiden appearance in the *Literary Apprentice* of 31 January 1928, together with "Ermita in the Rain." "Storm Kin" and "By Cool Reeds" which also appeared for the first time in the *Literary Apprentice* of 28 February 1928.

A sprinkling of other poems followed in the *Philippines Herald Magazine* in 1928: "Beyond the Afterdusk: To a Nun" (15 January), "Recognition" (29 January), "Remembrance" (19 February), "Symphony of Unrest" (24 June), "Forever and Ever" (26 June). "Droplets," a set of four poems including "Hate," "Epicure," "Metal Tendrils," "Death Patterns," and "In the Shadows," appeared in the *Philippines Herald Magazine* of 22 January. This was its second time in print after the *Collegian*. "But the Western Stars" also made its second appearance in print in the 13 May issue of the *Philippines Herald Magazine*. Manalang Gloria looks back with fondness on these early poems, but nevertheless calls them "student writing," "sophomoric gooey-gooey," "not real poetry."

At this time, Manalang Gloria read Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sara Teasdale, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Amy Lowell and other Imagist poets. But she revelled in Spanish poetry, which "cast a heady spell" over her.²⁷ "English is so cold," she remarked. "I think it was my predilection for Spanish poetry that gave my verses their melodiousness."

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Manalang Gloria had little regard for free verse, Jose Garcia Villa's in particular: ". . . the commas, the blanks, the coconuts. I don't like his 'modern' poetry."²⁸

In 1928, Fortunato de Leon took over the post of the *Collegian's* editor-in-chief, Celedonio Gloria having graduated. De Leon chose Manalang Gloria as his literary editor (her second time around) to Villa's great chagrin, as he had also been eyeing the position. Manalang Gloria recounts that when he learned of her good fortune, "Jose glowered at me; he was about to stand, hissing, 'I could scratch your eyes out,' but Arturo [Rotor], his arm around him, held him down. Ay, I left."²⁹

As a student, Manalang Gloria was formidable. She pushed herself relentlessly, taking seven subjects a semester. Moreover, she also squeezed in additional courses in painting in her fourth year, while also continuing her piano. She graduated in 1929, Ph.B. *summa cum laude* in English, with a minor in Geology.³⁰

"THE GOLDEN PHRASE":³¹ 1929-40

On 6 April 1929, barely a week after graduation, Angela married Celedonio Gloria. A Barbour scholarship to Michigan offered to her by then dean of the U.P., Maximo Kalaw, had to be foregone. Marital life also put an end to her painting and piano-playing, but not to her writing.³² For in the same year, she became editor of the *Philippines Herald Magazine* for six months.

"Message" was published in the *Herald Magazine* on 21 July 1929. "By Cool Reeds," "Remembrance," and "To A Lost One" each made a second appearance in print (*Philippines Herald Magazine*, 20 October, 29 September and 31 March respectively). She also experimented with what she called "prose poems," which also saw print in the *Herald*: "Into the Night I Pray" (1. August 1929) and "It Shall Be Thus" (December 1929).

She likewise produced prose, although of a very lyrical sort, publishing a string of articles that same year: "On the Art of 7 Posing" (4 August), "In the Shade of the Guitar"—an interview with guitarist Andres Segovia (15 September), "Fingering our Embroidered Past" (29 September) and "A Tale of Ceramic Curves" (28 August)—two

28. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

31. A phrase from "Change," *Poems* (1940), p. 31.

32. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, pp. 54, 55.

companion pieces on Dr. Bantug's collection of Philippine relics, and "An Intimate Sketch of a Nun and Her Art" (14 July).

Failing health, however, forced Manalang-Gloria to give up her post as editor of the *Herald Magazine*. She published two more poems in 1930: "An Invalid Looks Towards the Window" (*The Philippines Herald Magazine*, 31 May) and "Tabernacles" (*Graphic*, 27 August). It was confirmed that she had tuberculosis "from too much writing . . . till three in the morning."³³ The Glorias decided to sell their property and move to Albay for more healthful surroundings. Celedonio left his work at the Francisco Law Office, setting up practice in Legaspi instead.³⁴ Manalang Gloria got her much-needed rest, and in 1931, successfully gave birth to Ruben, their first child.

In 1931, T. Inglis Moore, then adviser of the U.P. Writers' Club, wrote enthusiastically of Manalang Gloria as one of the "outstanding (writers) who hold much promise." It was also then that he tagged her as "our Sara Teasdale—sweet without being sickly, melodious and charming."³⁵ In January 1931, an article entitled "Our Women Writers in English" appeared in *Graphic*. Its author, G.K. Geronimo, mentioned Manalang Gloria, along with Natividad Marquez as one of the "distinguished local writers . . . in the realm of poetry . . . belonging to the weaker sex."³⁶

In 1934, the Glorias and their son moved back to Manila, thinking that Manalang Gloria had regained her health. She went on to publish "Canticle," "Night Piece," and "Tropic Heritage" (all in the *Philippines Herald Magazine*: 21 March, 3 October, and 30 April 1934 respectively). "A Sigh in the Dark," "Kin" and "The Closed Heart" made a collective second appearance in print (in the *Philippine Magazine*, 30 April 1934).

These three poems elicited much praise from John Jefferson Siler, an American professor who had compiled two volumes of Filipino Poetry in English (1900–1940), intended for publication in the United States, but which never saw print:

One of the first writers in the Philippines to use the cinquain in a purely Japanese manner was Angela Manalang Gloria . . . Like moonstones in filigree is the delicate loveliness of these three poems. Their disturbing allusiveness, haunting, eerie, is the very essence of hokku art. These may be called the perfect example of this poem form written in the Philippines.³⁷

33. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Tom Inglis Moore, "Filipino Writing in English: A Few Impressions," *Philippine Magazine* 1 (1931).

36. G.K. Geronimo, "Our Women Writers in English," *Graphic*, 7 January 1931, p. 12.

37. John Jefferson Siler, "Hokku and Cinquain," *Philippine Magazine*, April 1934.

Manalang Gloria's health collapsed again soon after. Tuberculosis renewed its ravages. "One day, I just vomitted a cup of blood," Manalang Gloria recalls. She remained confined to bed from 1934 to 1937, subsisting on a strict diet of milk and eggs.³⁸

Nevertheless, these years were among her richest as a writer. "A bedridden bookworm, steeped in the fire of Spanish poetry,"³⁹ she produced a fever of poems, several of which broke into print. Among these were "Night Piece" (3 October 1934), "Soledad" (6 March 1935), "Mountain Pool" (31 March 1935), "April Morning" (10 April 1935), "Virac" (21 August 1935), "To a Lovely Woman" (23 August 1935, 1 November 1936), "Mayon Afternoon" (3 November 1937)—all of which saw print in *The Philippines Herald Magazine*.⁴⁰ She also wrote "Revolt from Hymen," "Heloise to Abelard," and "Old Maid Walking On A City Street" at this time.

Throughout her illness, Celedonio Gloria remained a loyal and supportive husband. "If he was the gallivanting type, perhaps I would have died." Celedonio read all his wife's poems, including those written in their marital quarrels. Manalang Gloria confesses to his having been the focus of many of her poems. She spoke of "an earthman unseeing," a "discordant embrace"⁴¹ and "kisses festering like sores."⁴² Manalang Gloria remembers that he silently went over such lines, checking for errors in mechanics, and without a single complaint, sent them off to print. "He was a very generous fellow . . . understanding, gentle . . . somebody who could not think ill of others." It was Celedonio, she says, who was "Abelard" and who was "Samson" in two of her most passionate love poems.⁴³

38. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 57.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

40. The others were "Tropic Heritage," *Philippines Herald Magazine*, 12 December 1934; "Postscript," *Graphic*, 7 February 1935; "Apology for Unwisdom," *Graphic*, 7 March 1935; "Poem: There are so many poems in my head," *Philippine Magazine*, 31 March 1935; "Complaint to the Muses," *Philippine Magazine*, 30 April 1935; "As An Oleander," *Graphic*, 2 May 1935; "Athena Speaks" *Graphic*, 27 June 1935; "Addenda to History," *The Sunday Tribune Magazine*, 18 August 1935; "Doña Inez to Don Juan," *The Sunday Tribune Magazine*, 17 November 1935; "Resurrection," *The Sunday Tribune Magazine*, 29 March 1936; "Cementerio del Norte," *Philippines Herald Magazine*, 28 October 1936; "Preludes to November," *The Sunday Tribune Magazine*; "This Will Be Remembered," *The Literary Apprentice*, 31 December 1937; "To An Idolater," *Philippines Herald Magazine*, 13 June 1937.

41. Phrases from Angela Manalang Gloria, "Mayon Afternoon," *The Philippines Herald Magazine*, 3 November 1937, p. 1.

42. A phrase from Angela Manalang Gloria's "Revolt from Hymen," *Poems* (1940), p. 106.

43. Angela Manalang Gloria, "Song of Awakening," *Poems* (1940), pp. 40-41, and in *Poems* (1950), pp. 42-43; "Heloise to Abelard" in *Poems* (1940), p. 39.

The 1930s were not only the years of Manalang Gloria's most prodigious writing. They were also the time when a body of criticism on her work—albeit slender—developed and took shape. Following sporadic critical comments by Moore and Siler in the early thirties came the scourge of Villa.

In 1935, he published a vicious attack on Philippine poetry, sparing no one, not even Manalang Gloria:

Let me now blast the theory that she is a first rate poet. At her best, she is a third rater, a writer of merely pretty poetry, pleasant, amateur verses. Her verses have the finish lacking in her other contemporaries (she is indeed the most polished writer) but she has no energy, her works are significantly inconsequential. They are pretty verses and they are very melodious . . . it is this melodiousness that wins her readers . . . but back of it all, there is nothing, no passion, no drive, only a feeble nostalgia. She is Miss Nostalgia . . . but not a major poet. Her verses never disturb; one reads them and is through with them. . . .⁴⁴

Rotor, for his part, seemed ambivalent. Attempting to "introduce and classify" the members of the U.P. Writers' Club, he wrote of the group represented by Manalang Gloria:

I am sorry to have no better word to call them (with) than that totally inadequate and much-abused 'romantic.' And yet, what else can one call the glamorous escape from life that is the poetry of Angela Manalang Gloria, of Trinidad Tarrosa, of Conrado Ramirez? They write of things which we know cannot be, and yet without which we cannot get along. A happiness that can never be ours envelops us when we read them. They speak of the rose and we inhale deeply, they talk of tears and our eyes become misty, they tell of stars, and we look out of our window up to heaven. They are the skilled workers of the guild, they fashion their phrases very much as a jewel-cutter would a rare diamond, they string their words together as they would the crushed sampaguitas of which they write.⁴⁵

In January 1937, Cornelio Faigao published a list of what, in his estimation, constituted the best poems published in the year 1936. Manalang Gloria's "Resurrection" received an honorable mention. In the article which accompanied the list of best poems, Faigao described the poetess as "trademarked by her short lyrics and by her fanciful imagery"⁴⁶ Faigao once more attempted an evaluation of local poetry in 1938. Manalang Gloria's "Mayon Afternoon" garnered honorable

44. Jose Garcia Villa, "The Status of Philippine Poetry," in *Graphic*, 6 June 1935, p. 9.

45. Arturo B. Rotor, "Introduction and Classification," *The Literary Apprentice* IX (1936): 36-41.

46. Cornelio Faigao, "Best Poems of 1936," *Graphic*, 28 January 1937, p. 65.

mention, while her "To An Idolater" merited first place in Faigao's "Roll of Honor." He explained his choice in the following words:

We like best Mrs. Gloria's 'To An Idolater' because it is a reiteration of a philosophy that we have always quietly nursed—that a woman a man loves is most often his true religion, and that a man who cannot love a woman is not fit to worship God.⁴⁷

Villa, Lopez and Faigao were the de-facto Filipino poet-critics of the time, there being no one else who published poetry criticism and who could claim membership in the U.P. Writers' Club. Although none of them were professional critics (there were none in fact), they were nevertheless the most qualified, and the only ones who took pains.

As her reputation grew, Manalang Gloria's poems began to appear in textbooks, notably *Philippine Prose and Poetry*, a textbook-anthology-series intended for secondary schools. *Philippine Prose and Poetry* was a landmark in literary history, since it was the first textbook to make use of "exclusively local contributions in literature." For three decades (1927-64), it shaped our 'national' literature in English to the extent that it shaped the young readers' sensibility.⁴⁸

Manalang Gloria's "But the Western Stars" first appeared in *Philippine Prose and Poetry*, volume one of 1935, then continued to grace reprints of this volume in 1946, 1948, 1949, 1952, 1956 and 1960. "To A Lost One" went through a similar odyssey, appearing first in *Philippine Prose and Poetry*, volume two of 1936, and in subsequent editions: 1946, 1948, 1949, 1951, 1956, and 1964.

"THE GOLDEN CALF": 1938-40⁴⁹

Manalang Gloria recovered her health in 1937, and her poems of the period spoke of the exhilaration she felt at being given a second chance at life:

And it was good to breathe again
 The little breath it gave to me
 And see with Death-awakened eyes
 Enchantment sitting on a pea

47. Cornelio Faigao, "Candles in the Wind," in *The Philippines Herald Midweek Magazine*, 23 February 1938, p. 6.

48. Gemino Abad and Edna Manlapaz, "Rereading Past Writ: Toward A History and Anthology of Filipino Poetry in English," *Philippine Studies* 34 (1986): 383.

49. The phrase is from Manalang Gloria's "Change," *Poems* (1940), p. 31.

And wonder ripening on thorns:
 It was enough, enough to be!
 I am beholden to Death
 For giving back my self to me!⁵⁰

With a new lease on life, however, came a radical shift in career. Felipe Manalang employed his daughter as his Manila agent and partner. Together they began dealing "in abaca twine, abaca belts and mosquito nets—with the Philippine Government and the Constabulary"—a business which was to thrive even after the war.⁵¹ Today she relishes memories of having eased competitors out of business. The poet discovered a keen business acumen, and now began to derive keen pleasure from the feel of profit: "Oh, the money then! . . . [It] came in boxes . . . we never wanted for anything."⁵² From then on, poetry was no longer her only muse. "To my adventures in business I owe a perspective of life bigger than any I would have acquired had I stayed cooped up in my old ivory tower."⁵³

Writing came sporadically. "The Moral Is" was published in *The Sunday Tribune Magazine* (24 April 1938), as was "1940 A.D." (25 August 1940), "For Man Must War," and "For One Who Slept And Died" (31 December 1940). No more was heard of Manalang Gloria till the Commonwealth Literary Contests.

THE COMMONWEALTH LITERARY CONTESTS

In 1940, Manalang Gloria published *Poems*, a collection of seventy-nine pieces, written mostly in her sick period, several of which had already seen print in various national newsmagazines. This slim volume was entered in the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Contest, sponsored by the Philippine Writers' League and the Commonwealth government. The collection won no prizes. The highest honors were accorded to Rafael Zulueta da Costa's *Like the Molave*, while a lesser prize was given to Villa's *Poems by Doveglion*.

The reasons for Manalang Gloria's losing may be traced to the Contests' "larger objectives," which can be gleaned from a passage from the *Report of the Chairman to the Board of Judges for English*:

In addition to the aesthetic test, the Board . . . applied the test of social significance; and in all cases where two works were observed to possess

50. Excerpt from Manalang Gloria's "The Debt," *Poems* (1940), p. 61.

51. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 58.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

53. Litiatco, "Practical Poetess," p. 60.

technical excellence and the purely artistic qualities in equal degree, it decided in favor of that work which contained this significance and the vital element of contemporaneity.⁵⁴

Poems, a collection of mostly very personal pieces, would have certainly failed the test of social significance—at least relative to Da Costa's *Like the Molave* (although it did contain a number of poems that treated social themes; among them, "To the Great Proletariat," and "1940 A.D.>").

S.P. Lopez, by then advocate of "proletarian literature" was reported to have remonstrated with Manalang Gloria and her fellow romantics precisely for their lack of "social significance." He had attacked them for their "yellow moons, silent trails, creaking bamboos (all references to Manalang Gloria's "Yellow Moon" and "To A Lost One"), sensuous nights." He asked them to "put away their childish toys . . . lock away their unfulfilled . . . adolescent yearnings." He urged them instead "to open their eyes first to see what life is all about and turn their craft to serious purpose."⁵⁵

Manalang Gloria, however, offers an additional explanation for the judges' cool reception of her work:

Do you know why it [*Poems* 1940] did not win the [Commonwealth] prize? . . . Mr. Walter Robb, the American among the judges told me: I voted for you. The others did not because there were several poems in the book that they considered objectionable. One of them was called 'Querida.' But the most objectionable to them, he said, the main reason why the others did not approve the book for the prize, was the poem 'Revolt from Hymen.' Robb further told me, 'I tried to persuade them that those were not against morals . . . ' but *wala*.⁵⁶

Another passage from the *Report of the Chairman to the Board of Judges for English* tends to confirm Manalang Gloria's statements:

Literature, it is universally admitted, deals primarily with values, and not merely with aesthetic values, but with values in general—values in any field or any aspect of life, where it is at all possible to distinguish between beauty and ugliness, pain and pleasure, justice and injustice, good and evil. Under the Rules governing these Contests, the Board felt it to be its duty

54. Report of the Board of Judges for English (for the 1940 Commonwealth Contests) in Manuel E. Arguilla, Carlos P. Romulo, and Teodoro Agoncillo, eds., *Literature Under the Commonwealth* (Manila: Philippine Writers' League, 1940), p. 80.

55. Herbert Schneider, "Period of Emergence: Its Literature" in Antonio Manuud, ed. *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), p. 601.

56. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 45.

to reject the doctrine of Art for Art's sake as the sole basis of judgment, as a principle wholly inadequate to the larger objectives of these Contests.⁵⁷

Cornelio Faigao, however, stoutly upheld the value of *Poems* 1940 (in his annual selection of best poetry for 1940, he had given Manalang Gloria's "Night" and "Song of Awakening" honorable mention), insisting on its "right" to differ from *Like the Molave*:

Interestingly antithetical to Da Costa's work is Angela Manalang Gloria's *Poems*. Da Costa's voice is strong and resilient, Manalang's is fragile and thin. *The Molave* smacks of Whitman and Sandburg just as *Poems* tastes of Sara Teasdale. The first is a transitive verb, active voice; the second, intransitively passive. One sparkles and pushes; the other glimmers with the quiet energy of sunlight in a pool. Both works are highly provocative of the subjects of universals and accidentals in art.⁵⁸

Still, something by way of consolation came to Manalang Gloria when *Graphic* chose her as "Outstanding Woman for Literature" in 1940.⁵⁹

THE WAR YEARS

When World War II broke out, Manalang Gloria continued to supply the Philippine Constabulary with abaca belts and mosquito nets. During the later years of the Japanese occupation, the Glorias, together with their two children (Angelina was born in 1938), evacuated to the mountains of Batangas to wait for the war's end.

On 11 March 1945, they received word that American soldiers had arrived in the place. In great excitement, Celedonio Gloria and Ruben (then fourteen) went out to meet them. Manalang Gloria never saw her husband alive again. Japanese soldiers had chanced upon father and son. Celedonio was bayoneted to death, sustaining eleven stab wounds. Ruben was severely injured and left for dead, but he managed to crawl to the nearest American camp, where he received medical attention. Manalang Gloria, then pregnant with Celedonio Jr., soon learned of her husband's death, but a long time passed before she could locate Ruben. For a time, she had given him up for dead, too.

The war ended, and Manalang Gloria had lost nearly everything. "Oh, my goodness, if I told you all my story, how I suffered right after liberation . . . I had come back to Albay, and I could not buy a crib, so I put my baby in a Carnation milk box. After the war, I was poor

57. Report of the Judges for English, p. 80.

58. Cornelio Faigao, "The Best Poems of 1940" in *The Philippines Herald Midweek Magazine*, 12 February 1941, p. 10.

59. Litiatco, "Practical Poetess," p. 61.

as a rat; everything I owned was wiped out . . ."⁶⁰ She was almost totally shattered, she recalls. But recover she did. Courage and a keen practical sense gained from her business ventures helped her rebuild her life.

She spoke with great pain of her great loss, as in "Dawning" (*The Sunday Times Magazine*, 2 November 1941) and "Poem For C." (*Saturday Evening News Magazine*, 30 November 1946):

Let the mind be steel and the heart be fallow
 Morning and midnight are one,
 The dream is no longer a dream and a halo;
 Love is gone.⁶¹

CRITICAL RECEPTION: 1950-85

In the late forties, the Bureau of Education approached Manalang Gloria, and expressed interest in reissuing *Poems* (1940) as a student edition. The result was *Poems* (1950), which contained the following prefatory remarks:

This edition is intended primarily for student readers. In its preparation, a number of poems included in the original version of 1940 were deleted and replaced with a few of the author's hitherto uncollected earlier writings.⁶²

Manalang Gloria reports that among the poems considered inappropriate for students and therefore excluded from the book were "Hate," "For Men Must War" and an entire section containing "Revolt from Hymen," "Soledad," "Querida," and "Heloise to Abelard."⁶³

Other changes were also made:

. . . Mr. Celedonio Salvador, the Director of Education, told me they were going to use the book for the schools. He instructed me: 'You remove this . . . remove that.' Even some words were deleted and changed. There was that poem, 'Pier 7', in which I had to substitute 'bores' for 'whores,' a word which they did not want there . . . "The Tax Evader" is [still] there. The title had to be changed [to "I Have Begrudged the Years"] otherwise the BIR would [object]."⁶⁴

60. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, pp. 47, 49.

61. Angela Manalang Gloria, "Poem for C," *The Evening News Saturday Magazine*, 30 November 1946, p. 6.

62. Manalang Gloria, *Poems* (1950), flyleaf.

63. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, pp. 65-66.

64. *Ibid.*

Since *Poems 1950*, Manalang Gloria has chosen to remain silent. Therefore, her reputation as it stands today is based entirely on her canon of two collections, as well as a number of others in separate publications—all of which add up to 138 pieces.

Since then, literary historians, especially textbook historians, have tended to repeat the same comments which her contemporaries made about her poetry, according her the status of a major poet of the period.⁶⁵

Criticism that followed the publication was polite but indifferent:

. . . [Angela Manalang Gloria's] *Poems 1950* has been praised somewhat unduly, for its exquisiteness and poignancy.⁶⁶

In Angela Manalang Gloria's *Poems*, there is evidence of enough competence in the established forms for which to fix intensely personal experience. Its results have charmed not a few. The hope has been expressed that she will find in technical virtuosity as convenient point of departure.⁶⁷

A reevaluation of her work was attempted from the vantage point of new critical theories, particularly New Criticism, which by the mid-fifties had begun to alter the Filipino literary landscape. Among such reevaluations was David Quemada's:

Trinidad Tarrosa Subido and Angela Manalang Gloria are representative of the general poetic tempers they live in . . . they can be appreciated more for their historical significance than for their aesthetic values.⁶⁸

Later, Lucila Hosillos spoke of her in terms of literary influences:

Angela Manalang Gloria's passionate romanticism is derived from Edna St. Vincent Millay, her langorous mood from Sara Teasdale, and her cold passion from Elinor Wylie. The compactness of line, image and epigrammatic verse were reminiscent of Emily Dickinson; the clear-cut images, precision and concentration of the Imagists.⁶⁹

65. Textbooks describe her poetry as melodious (Carunungan and Subido, *Panorama of Literature for Filipinos*, 1966; Seranno and Ames, *A Survey of Filipino Literature in English from Apprenticeship to Contemporary* 1975), tender, delicate, lyrical (Carunungan and Subido, 1966). Croghan (*The Development of Philippine Literature in English Since 1900*, 1966) and Castillo and Medina (*Philippine Literature from Ancient Times to the Present*, 1966, 1972) spoke of her as an important lyric poet.

66. (Manuel Viray, "Writing Then and Now" in *The Philippine Quarterly*, July 1951, p. 46.

67. Federico Mangahas, "Our Literature Today and Tomorrow" in *The Literary Apprentice*, 1952.

68. David Quemada, "Major Influences on Seven Leading Poets" *Silliman Journal* (1954), p. 53.

69. Lucila V. Hosillos, *Philippine American Literary Relations 1898-1941* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1969), pp. 74-75.

In 1985, Joseph Ignatius Gonzales described her poetry in the following manner:

[Angela Manalang Gloria] can be tremendously forceful in her satiric pieces. Her indignant contemptuous feelings she does not care to disguise . . . her images are at times quite original . . . diction is rather sophisticated.⁷⁰

But it is Gemino Abad who, attempting a fresh reading of her poetry, pays Manalang Gloria a supreme compliment, speaking of her in 1982 as the "best poet of the period . . . next of course to Villa." He continues:

One could wish Gloria's *Poems* had won over Da Costa's *Like the Molave* since her poems are fresher on second reading, more effective and to me at least even more Filipino . . . Poetic strength lies in that specification of reality and revelation of details by which the poem coheres into a whole and shapes both its thought and emotion.⁷¹

Thus, over a period of fifty years, Angela Manalang Gloria's reputation has remained secure.

CONCLUSION

Where is Angela Manalang Gloria today? "Lost in a world of ricemilling and warehousing, stock market dealings and construction, turning to poetry only in her off moments," wrote the poetess to her niece 1978.⁷² Manalang Gloria today resides with her daughter and family in the seclusion of a farm in Tabaco, Albay. She runs her own ricemill—like a dictator, she says. She is manager, accountant, cashier, watchdog. Her mill runs even on Christmas day. She had the legendary python of the place beheaded, when she cut down a century old tree so that she would have a place to dry her palay.⁷³

She listens to classical music in the evenings and after that, does some reading and writing. "I don't exactly crave the comforts of life. As long as I have good music to listen to, and a good book to read . . . that is all I want."⁷⁴ And of her poetry? She has written quite a lot since then—"not about love anymore"—but is biding her time as far as a new publication is concerned.

70. Joseph Ignatius Gonzales, *Philippine Poetry 1928-1950: A Critical Survey* (Manila: Dispatch Publications, 1986) p. 90.

71. Gemino H. Abad, "Forty Years of Solitude: Five Early Filipino Poets in English," *Jose* (October 1982), p. 66.

72. Angela Manalang Gloria, Letter to Lilian Manalang Coronel, 16 February 1978.

73. Alegre and Fernandez, *The Writer and His Milieu*, pp. 44, 48.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 44.