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Angela Manalang Gloria, by Manlapaz

Review Author: Soledad S. Reyes

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not sustained by the succeeding poems, thus, making the reader a prey to emotional indigestion. The Filipino translations can also stand some improvement. The liberal use of Cebuano vocabulary in the Filipino translations makes the translations sound awkward. Moreover, some translations do not have the smoothness of the original Cebuano.

On the whole, however, the book is invaluable as a repository of important Cebuano poetry. Certainly, this book will be of use to all lovers and scholars of literature.

Rex Arnold P. Alamban, S.J.
Loyola House of Studies
Ateneo de Manila University

Angela Manalang Gloria, A Literary Biography. By Edna Zapanta Manlapaz. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994. 176 pages.

Edna Zapanta Manlapaz's *Angela Manalang Gloria, A Literary Biography* should be placed in its proper context in order to understand its significance.

Although there has been a thriving production of secondary texts in Philippine literary scholarship, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, the focus in a large number of these surveys and histories of genres has generally been on trends and movements. This diachronic approach to the study of Philippine Literature, in English or in the vernacular, is as it should be, especially when we consider the dearth of works that attempt to impose some kind of order on numerous primary texts using different schemes of classification.

However, this emphasis on broad views, which is extremely crucial at this point, has invariably led various scholars to gloss over, if not ignore, the many individual writers and their productions. There have been exceptions in the works done on Amado V. Hernandez and Jose Corazon de Jesus, both canonical Tagalog poets, or on Aurelio Tolentino and Magdalena Jalandoni, for example, whose art has been juxtaposed against their experiences at specific periods in history.

Manlapaz's work goes further than showing how intimately related history and art really are. As a biography, it proposes to present a portrait of Angela Manalang Gloria, a leading poet in English in the first half of the twentieth century. The reader thus gets glimpses of the myriad experiences of the poet constituting her life story. The reader follows the path trodden by the biographer as she presents an engrossing narrative that spans almost 80 years. Angela Manalang Gloria is shown as the quiet daughter of a middle-class family in Pampanga, the diligent student at the University of the Philippines, the rising poet of her generation, which included a veritable Who's Who of Philippine Literature in English. The narrative follows the

poet's life as a married woman and mother of three children, the travails brought about by the Pacific War on her and her family. There is a whole section that describes her as a shrewd businesswoman who took risks which eventually brought her more material prosperity.

At first glance, this account of landmark events in the poet's life is itself a worthy endeavor if only because it is the first biography of a writer widely acknowledged as one of the most significant poets in English in the 1930s. In the work, the reader gets to situate Angela Manalang Gloria against both the historical and literary contexts. Historically, the poet started her career within and as a product of the educational system instituted by the Americans. In those decades of deepening colonization, the valorization of English as the language of fine literature had already been taken for granted. It was almost unthinkable for the aspiring writers at the State University to write in any other language. The impressive tradition of literature in English, more specifically the writings of nineteenth-century poets, was accessible to young Filipino writers.

Angela Manalang Gloria's poems, eventually published in book form as *Poems* (1940), testify to the far-reaching influence exerted by both history and aesthetic conventions. As Manlapaz clearly points out, the poet's impressive output came out at the time when she appeared to be most deeply entrenched in western literary conventions in the 1920s and 1930s. The fire appeared to have burnt out when she became saddled with more responsibilities as wife, mother and eventually, as breadwinner; she has, as Manlapaz puts it, "settled down to a life of uneventful domesticity." But she lived on in the minds of generations of students who read the influential *Philippine Prose and Poetry* where several of her poems—"But the Western Stars," "To a Lost One," among others—appeared in several editions.

The task of resurrecting the past and making the people who dwell in it come out alive is what makes biographies significant as these texts continuously weave in and out of the subject's personal history and, through words, seek to present the subject, in all his/her complexity, to a contemporary audience. There is no doubt that Manlapaz has achieved this task for Angela Manalang Gloria as subject is revealed in the nine chapters of the biography.

What makes Manlapaz's work uncommon, however, is the manner in which the biographer constructs her narrative. Firstly, the text presents simultaneously facts culled from careful research (written accounts, interviews, contextual materials) and the subject's poems to supplement "objective" truth. It is as if, by analyzing Manalang's poems juxtaposed against other data, Manlapaz was seeking to reach deeply into the levels of consciousness, and even of the unconscious, which the subject's natural reticence and the dearth of details did not allow the author to explore fully.

Thus, in the account much attention is focused on Manalang Gloria's poems insofar as they could shed light on the poet's concept of her craft, her notions about love and marriage, her own anxieties and misgivings as

an artist and as a woman. For example, Chapter Three, entitled "Songs of Awakening" is replete with beautifully, haunting love poems where the poet wanders off into a world inhabited by such romantic and tragic figures as Delilah, Heloise, Jezebel, Helen, Francesa and Magdalen. As Manlapaz astutely argues:

Not for Angela the subdued albeit passionate tone of some of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets that speak of a love that meets the level of each day's quiet need. For a high romantic like Angela-the-poet, love was grand passion or nothing. (p. 39)

In two particularly poignant poems, "To a Mestiza" and "To Consuelo," Manlapaz finds the depth of the poet's feelings for a friend, Consuelo Ammen, who passed away.

This oscillation between Angela Manalang Gloria as her subject and the poet's texts which, upon analysis, can generate multiple and significant meanings is a source of strength in Manlapaz's narrative. The reader becomes privy to the poet's world and the complex manner in which she has responded to and constructed various experiences she has encountered in her long life. In this way, the very process of living and ordering this life becomes accessible to the reader of Manlapaz's readings of her subject as text.

This rendering, in obviously subjective ways, of a person's life in all its mystery, is another of Manlapaz's achievement. As she unequivocally states in the Preface: "This biography is not the story of the life of Angela Manalang Gloria. It is *my* story of *her* life."

An element which might confuse the reader is the author's intrusiveness as she unabashedly goes into the mind and heart of the poet, and while lodged there, attempts to make sense of the chaos which reality is. Thus, she constantly speculates, interprets, and proposes various readings into the poet's inner life.

Indeed, to read Manlapaz's text is to encounter and eventually unravel two life stories of two women and the crucial junctures at which one intersects with the other in a seamless and well-written narrative. *Angela Manalang Gloria: A Literary Biography* thus provides a new mode of approaching and ultimately appropriating a subject. In the process, the biography problematizes certain taken-for-granted notions not only regarding such slippery terms as "objectivity" and "subjectivity", but perhaps more importantly, the relationship between the author and her subject.

The writing of this book is a learning experience for Manlapaz, and its reading/readings should help its reader make sense not only of Angela Manalang Gloria's life and craft, but of each reader's life and its wondrous mysteries.

Soledad S. Reyes
Department of Filipino
Ateneo de Manila University