

## “La juventud no tiene historia”: Gender and Consolation in the *Corona Fúnebre* Elegies and Eulogies Dedicated to Spanish American *Señoritas* (1858-1896)

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When the anonymous editor A. B. C. pens the introduction to Nemea González y Sardón’s 1867 *Corona Fúnebre*, he resorts to an unattributed citation stating “youth have no history” to contextualize the scant achievements of the young woman memorialized (6, translation mine). Indeed, most of the forgotten funeral memorials published under the aforementioned title are dedicated to older, accomplished men whose social and political status as presidents of nations, generals, doctors, and celebrity poets assured them a place in history. Young, unmarried women—*señoritas*—did not normally occupy political or social spaces, outside of the domestic sphere, that would permit them to cultivate a historical presence.<sup>1</sup>

How then were these señoritas featured in funeral remembrances, if their short lives precluded them from making significant contributions in their respective countries? What cultural dynamics determined the reflections, in the form of elegies and eulogies, about their lives? In this study, I examine examples of the *Corona Fúnebre* dedicated to señoritas from Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and the island of Trinidad, covering the time period 1858-1896. The collected memorials to young women that appear under the shared title of *Corona Fúnebre*, I argue, originated not only as expressions of consolation, a nineteenth-century sensibility borne out of sentimentalism, but also served as moral conduct literature organized to preserve and perpetuate a particular patriarchal social memory of the ideal female subject. An examination of these memorials yields significant, yet previously unexamined, information about and insights into how nineteenth-century Spanish American women were perceived and idealized.

The elegies, eulogies, obituaries, and short biographies found in the *Corona Fúnebre* consolidated a postmortem, imagined, female identity that defined a prescribed womanhood for those still living. This genre constructed and conserved both republican and religion-based ideals for *señoritas* who were expected to be pure, virtuous, angelic, and stellar representatives of the nation (or region) they inhabited in life. Yet, a close reading of the collections will reveal some of the slippages in the moral expectations placed upon the women as male poets write employing contradictory images conflating religious symbolism with libidinous allusions. Grief and consolation are the main goals of these elegies that also

celebrate the youth, vitality, and erotic potential of the *señoritas*, thereby juxtaposing a myriad of identities on the departed. Importantly, the memorials were mostly published to console powerful and prominent citizens whose own prestige was exalted by the public projection of their daughter's virtue.<sup>2</sup>

Writing about the elegy in the Victorian context, John D. Rosenberg argues that this poetic form was a "survival strategy" deployed to counteract a rapidly changing society:

The Victorians who speak to us most urgently today thought of themselves as living not in an age of peace or progress but, in John Stuart Mill's phrase, in 'an age of transition,' caught between a vanishing past and an uncertain future. Such an unsettled cultural climate provided rich soil for the flourishing of elegy. (1)

The 1858 to 1896 time span of the memorials available for this study covers a significant transition period in the history of these countries, marking major political and societal changes. During this juncture, Peru experiences conflicts with neighboring countries and internal divisions within the country lead to power struggles between conservatives and liberals. Mexico undergoes a period of foreign intervention with the reign of Maximilian I, an Austrian archduke who was declared Emperor of the Second Mexican Empire. This was followed by the triumph of the liberal army in 1867, and the country's turn to national reconstruction and consolidation under the rule of General Porfirio Díaz (1884-1911). Guatemala sees modernization and the introduction of a coffee-growing economy towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Cuba does not gain its independence until 1898 and is still a colony of Spain when the bulk of these surviving memorials are published. Trinidad, the Caribbean colony, is a slave society until 1886. Most of the collections preserved hail from Cuba, and provide a glimpse into pre-independence regional identity and pride.

Although the women perish under a myriad of circumstances, and represent different nations, they hail from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Their memorials advance insights into the funeral rite practices of the cultural elite and the social environment that surrounded them. Often, for example, the editors gathered the *epicedios*, or funeral orations originally pronounced at the burial site, and printed them in the collection as well. Visually, the publications featured stock graphic design images such as a lapidary with the angel of death standing behind it or the classical Greek lyre. Other print graphic designs included open books, musical notes, dual-branched funeral wreaths, and the Christian cross. As technology progressed, subsequent *Corona Fúnebre* collections featured studio photographs of the honored, when they were alive.<sup>3</sup> The ones included in this study are dedicated to *señoritas* whose lives end when they were approximately fourteen to thirty years of age. Throughout this essay, I note the year of death of the young women. The birth year is often omitted in the memorials, although some elegists refer to the age of passing of their subjects in poetic terms such as "diez y seis abrilés" (González 13).

Max Cavitch, who studies the elegy in the U.S. context from the Puritans to Walt Whitman, notes that the genre traces "increasingly singular experiences of interiority, of personal

identity as an ongoing and individuated process within a *fin-de-siècle* society of mass consumption and mass democracy” (5). The writers who penned these elegies in Spanish America sought to capture the unique attributes of each young woman, often remarking on their talents as well as revealing imagined or lived moments of intimate domestic and/or social life. For most of these poets and eulogists, it is the perceived honorable moral character of the departed that warrants their public, printed, and circulated memorial.<sup>4</sup>

Continuing his premise on the merits of the deceased, nineteen-year old’s life, A.B.C. writes: “Y la de Nemecia está reducida a dos palabras: amó a la virtud y amó a sus padres, cerró los ojos cuando apenas empezó a vivir” (6). His words serve to summarize the content of most of the memorials to *señoritas* in Spanish America: those remembered died having lived virtuously, they were loved by their parents because they were exemplary daughters and, although young, they accomplished acts worthy of note. Nemecia’s memorial of barely thirty pages includes a short biography, eulogies, three eloquent elegies, and the aforementioned *epicedios*. The eulogies speak to her virtues in family life, outline her intelligence, and engage in the task of Christian (Roman Catholic) consolation.<sup>5</sup>

M. Sardón describes Nemecia as a “joven importante” and her achievements are delineated in scholastic terms, where we notice a shift from the attention to physical beauty found in other eulogies, to a recognition of educational successes: “cultivó otras ciencias y música, en las que hizo notables progresos” (16). However, the explicit goal of highlighting her outstanding qualities is stated as the example she poses for others seeking to be valued or approved by society: “una prudencia ejemplar, una amabilidad y dulzura en el trato social, y una obediencia respetuosa y veneración hacia sus padres, la hicieron una joven modelo, y cuyos pasos debían servir de norma para todas las personas que quieran, como Nemecia granjearse el aprecio” (16). The very first line in the first elegy of three by an unknown author states: “Era una vírgen, de virtudes llena / Al mundo penetró con gran fortuna; / Mas la suerte fatal que el bien condena / Con amargo pesar meció su cuna” (A.B.C. 23). Thus, the remembrances to *señoritas* not only propagate the social and political importance of the parent-child relationship but often serve as moral treatises emphasizing the values of virtue, generosity, obedience, and sexual purity as essential aspects of female identity.

While the collections include biographies and some obituaries, it is in the elegy, however, that poets craft the images that limn the social expectations of sexual abstinence placed upon young unmarried women. The terms virgin, virginal, pure, and chaste appear in many of the stanzas to the *señoritas*, at times along with claims that they were really supernatural beings on earth called to return to their heavenly origins. The elegy, a poem whose traditional central theme is mourning over the loss of a departed loved one, performs double duty as it becomes an agent of the perpetuation of the proper moral, domestic, and religious conduct of the women remembered.

Mercedes Fernández de Castro y Trelles (d. 1858) is the ultimate virgin, the virgin of virgins for refusing to consider marriage:

Tú, vírgen de las vírgenes querida  
Y envidiada también, tú que guardabas

De virtud un tesoro inagotable,  
 Dijiste: “en este mundo deleznable  
 Esposo no hay a mi virtuoso anhelo.”  
 Y radiante de fe subiste al cielo  
 Buscando al galardón que ambiciabas. (Cadora 59)

Similarly, the elegist A. de la Peña comments on Prisca Martínez y Arredondo (d. 1861) and her beauty, as well as her virtue: “Y entonces recuerdo ¡Oh Prisca! / Tu belleza y tu virtud, / Tomo en brazos el laud / y quiero en llanto cantar” (12). Concepción Castro (d. 1866) is “Pura, candida azucena / Que en bello jardín creció / Al arrullo de las brisas / Y tostada por el sol” (Urzaiz 20). Pilar Tenorio Zavala (d. 1866) is a “virgen celestial” and the elegist laments the ephemeral nature of her life: “¡Ah! ¿Nada te movió, virgen hermosa, / A creer que presto tu existir risueño / Se trocaría en el eterno sueño / Que hoy te arrulla en la huesta silenciosa?” (Zorilla, “Una lágrima” 89). Many of the writers find a common theme in remarking on the brevity of their subject’s life.

Tenorio’s memorial also reveals that women close to her were complicit in and cultivated the cult of virginity. Catalina Zapata’s eulogy exclaims: “Pilar! ... ¿Quién vio a esa virgen de frente pudorosa, de enhiesto talle y centellantes ojos, que no se sintiese subyugado por una irresistible simpatía para rendir homenaje a esa criatura angelical?” (31). Rita Cetina Gutiérrez (1846-1908), a friend of the family, registers a similar rhetoric and uses the present tense to denote assurance that Pilar is one of the chorus of virgins at the footstool of the Creator: “Tú, cuyo acento celestial y tierno / Entre el coro de vírgenes levantas, / Y el bien supremo de la gloria cantas / Ante el sacro escabel del Ser Eterno” (25-26). In Clorinda Dupuch’s 1867 *Corona Fúnebre*, a memorial where most women are invited to contribute, a similar pattern evolves. María Josefa Mujía’s elegy perpetuates the virtue of chastity:

No para ti, paloma candorosa,  
 Fue esta mansión fatal de desventura,  
 Que otro nido feliz, de paz dichosa,  
 Conservó el Sumo Ser a tu alma pura.

Al mirarte tan dulce, casta y bella  
 Te llamó con arrullo soberano;  
 No quiso cruces la escabrosa huella,  
 Cruda y punzante del dolor insano. (9)

In the same memorial, Carolina Freyre de Jaymes describes Clorinda as, “Virgen de púdica risa, / De encantadora mirada, / Nívea rosa deshojada / Al primer rayo de sol” (11). Mercedes Belzú de Dorado concurs with another common theme also broached by the contributors, the belief that these señoritas avoided being marred by immorality during their time on earth: “De la existencia el huracán glacial / No deshojó las rosas de tu frente; / No borró los ensueños de tu mente, / No desgarró tu velo virginal” (12-13). These elegies suggest that the Roman Catholic church, with its cult of Marian devotion, established the tenets of the *Ángel del Hogar* ideology that permeated the *Corona Fúnebre*, and perhaps inspired Spaniard María del Pilar Sinués de Marco’s configuration of women as domestic angels.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, the elegy provided the platform for male poets to comment on young women's bodies within the prescribed discourses of remembrance and virtue in respectful, albeit erotic tones. The poet G. Schweyer's elegy "El Paso a la Eternidad," dedicated to the aforementioned Cuban señorita Castro y Trelles, focuses on what was once the deceased's overall vitality by highlighting her corporal attributes: physical beauty, with an emphasis on her breasts and waist. The poetic voice reconstructs a ballroom scene typical of nineteenth-century salon culture. The male gaze recalls the fashionable maid by deploying an emphatic first-person subject pronoun:

Yo la he visto gozar... la vi en la fiesta  
Mover alegre su gallardo talle,...

Yo la vi suspirar cuando cansada  
Su seno palpitante se movía ...

Yo la miré: su traje era de fiesta  
Movía alegre su gallardo talle. //

Era aquella la virgen que en la fiesta  
Me adormeció con su belleza pura,  
La que anidó en su labio la ternura,  
La que dio su sonrisa a la floresta. //

Y la mujer gallarda de la fiesta,  
De genio alegre, de flexible talle,  
Como la palma feneció del valle,  
Cual lirio marchitóse en la floresta.  
Siempre ceñida, sí, su pura frente  
De májico (sic) pudor, una sonrisa  
De amargura y dolor, como la brisa  
Rodaba por su labio indiferente. [. . .]

No daba ya un latido su albo seno,  
Que revelase en él una esperanza  
De una futura dulce bienandanza... (7-11).<sup>7</sup>

The dual-natured remembrances that juxtapose the virtuous and voluptuous aspects of the *señorita* memorialized betrays the underlying challenge of the male elegist as the poetic voice balances concerns of the spirit with those of the flesh in recollection and representation. Similar images that contrapose antithetical word-play constructs are found in Maria E. Tamborrell y Macias's (d. 1873) *Corona Fúnebre* where she is described as "la seductora virgen jalapeña," noting her regional Xalapa roots (Fernández xiv). As demonstrated in the previous examples, homologous descriptive language that commingles sensuality and virginal purity is found in many of the memorials surveyed for the unmarried young women.<sup>8</sup>

The poetic voice in one of Castro y Trelles's dedicated elegies remarks on her golden locks, here employing hair as a metonym for women's sexuality. This erotic contemplation of her corpse borders into the realm of necrophilia:

Deja, MERCED, contemplar  
 En tus dorados cabellos  
 Los virginales destellos  
 De tu hermosura sublime. (Florencio López 29)

Note the contrasting concepts in a sonnet that remarks about Castro y Trelles's corpse as it lies in the cold sepulchre: "Joven beldad en lecho alabastrino / Posaba dulcemente, semejando / *La virgen (sic) de los últimos amores...*" (Délío 67; italics in the original). The necrophilic tendencies echoed in these verses reveals how romantic writers used death as the "ultimate form of passivity" to construct a feminine ideal in what Mulhall identifies as the "fetishization of the dead female body" (4, 6).

Similarly, for Manuel Castillo Manzanilla his friend Pilar Tenorio (d. 1866) is both divine and seductive as he imagines her in repose:

Y ahora ¡ay triste! tu lánguida cabeza  
 Descansa entre las sombras del panteón,  
 Ya marchita la angélica belleza  
 De tu rostro divino y seductor. (69)

A recurring trope in these memorials is that of the deceased as an angel on earth who, upon death, ascends to the heavens to be with her Maker.<sup>9</sup> In the earliest *Corona Fúnebre* studied (Castro y Trelles), the elegist asserts that the deceased was really an angel sent to comfort us:

Ángel bajado del cielo  
 A consolar la amargura  
 De este mundo sin ventura  
 ¿Por qué tan presto tu vuelo  
 Lo remontas a la Altura? (Mestre y Tolon 24)

Another elegy for Castro y Trelles repeats the same concept in a verse that sees many reincarnations in subsequent memorials dedicated to young women: "¡Ay! Era un ángel que abatió su vuelo; / Y al buscar un apoyo en su camino / Batió sus alas y volvióse al cielo" (Acosta 27). A young woman who is represented not only as an angel on earth but a goddess, María Rosado y Lizardi (d. 1882), dies at just fourteen years of age and is the daughter of a governor of the state of Yucatán (Octavio Rosado, 1882-1886). The elegy is followed by yet another common element that we find in the memorials, the depiction of human life as painful, a trial to be endured, and a valley of tears:

¿En dónde está la Diosa en cuya frente  
 La virtud y el amor resplandecía  
 Como en el cielo azul y trasparente

El luminar espléndido de día?...

¿Dónde partió la virgen seductora  
Envidia de los astros y las flores? ...

Tendió el ángel de la luz las níveas alas  
Y abandonó este valle de tristeza...(Gil y Gil n.p.)

The poets address the young women as if they were alive and present, or speak with them as if the deceased can hear from the grave. Similarly, in Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos's (1744-1811) "Elegía a la ausencia de Marina," the poetic voice remarks on the subject's beauty and inquires about her fate: "¡Ay! ¿Dó te lleva tu maligna estrella, / infeliz hermosura? ¿Dónde el hado, / conmigo ahora adverso y rigoroso, / quiere esconder la luz de tu belleza?" (n.p.). Salvatore Poeta identifies this strategy as the second and third of the four principles that he asserts as comprising the Spanish elegy: "la dinámica Yo-Tú interactiva entre el sentimiento de la culpabilidad y de esceptismo ante el más allá...," and the third as "la trascendencia metamórfica del Tú..." (14). José de Espronceda's (1808-1842) "Canto a Teresa" incorporates these principles, adding an epic quality to the three hundred and fifty-two verses.

However, rather than the epic tone found in Espronceda's elegy, the Spanish-American poets during this period are intimists in their expression. Rodolfo Navarrete's question for Pilar begins the stanza and declares the sole reproductive imperative for young women in nineteenth-century Latin America: "¿Por qué te esquivas de mi vista ansiosa, / Cándida virgen, para amar nacida?" (73). The reality of a young life truncated also has poets boldly questioning the designs of God, once again placing value on the status of virginity.

The death of María Lowenthal (Guatemala, d. 1893) prompts Rodolfo Figueroa to venture into reproaches against God, an unseemly public position for a believer to engage in, but one that certainly echoed with those mourning. The poetic voice rhetorically inquires:

¡Oh Dios clemente! Perdona  
Si es que blasfema mi labio,  
Mas si es verdad que eres justo  
Y que eres Bueno, Dios santo,  
¿Por qué siempre a nuestras vírgenes  
Te llevas a tu lado? (18)

Characteristically, the verses end with a rebuke of the current state of affairs in the expectation of morality for young women: "¡Tienes tantas en el Cielo / Y aquí hay tan pocas, Dios mío!" (Figueroa 18). These words of judgment reified the sexual and moral expectations placed upon *señoritas* that were not present in the memorials dedicated to young men who also perished unexpectedly.

A recurring trope surrounding the unanticipatedly ephemeral lives of these women is expressed in neoclassical references. Aljovín y Domínguez resorts to the image of the Greek Fates tearing the strings of life: "Llegó la muerte, y con guadaña impía / Tronchó tus fibras,

cruel, una por una / Y sólo fuiste ¡Oh virgen! flor de un día” (16). The uncertainty of life expectancy that the death of these young women signaled, along with the realization that good, virtuous women were not immune to *la Parca*, provided the poets with material to express existential angst tied to the cultural, political, and historical transitions occurring in Spanish America.

A quotation that reappears among the elegist is attributed to François de Malherbe (1555-1628) and is found in both French and Spanish, “Vivió lo que las rosas: el espacio de una mañana” (quoted by Gil y Gil, n.p.).<sup>10</sup> Another version of the quote is found in a eulogy for Prisca Martínez y Arredondo (d. 1861) titled “A la memoria de Prisca.” Here it is unattributed and reads, “Flor arrancada del vergel lozana / Vivió lo que la rosa; una mañana” (Moyuelo 25). By 1896, it is so familiar that the quote appears in French, without attribution, in a eulogy for Camerina Pavón y Oviedo (d. 1896). Later in the text, the author remarks on the ephemeral nature of her life, utilizing a simile, and quoting the source, “Como las rosas de Malherbe, sólo vivió el espacio de una mañana” (Iza 35).

Although there are many historical, political, and social disparities among the countries represented, there are some common social and funeral rite practices observed in these collections. One social practice centers around an editor or compiler, usually a friend of the deceased or their family, presenting these memorials as a gift to those grieving.

The word “ofrenda,” translated as offering or gift, often appears as a subtitle title in the *Corona Fúnebre*. The word is a gesture of affection and genteel consolation. It also signaled that the publication was offered free of charge to the family in mourning. The memorials circulated mostly as private publications distributed among a circle of choice friends, however, some were included as supplemental material in the local newspaper.<sup>11</sup> Writing about mourning practices in the nineteenth-century U.S., Mary Louise Kete notes that the bonds in the literature she studies are “formed through an exchange of tokens of affection in an economy not of capital but of emotions” (37). The collaborative nature of these expressions of sorrow exercised by the elegists, eulogists, biographers, and those consoled signal “the raw elements of a complex cultural code” (16). The Spanish-American memorials reminded the family of the links of affection, an important gesture that solidified cultural and political elite alliances.

In the title of the memorial dedicated to the aforementioned Tenorio we read *Corona Fúnebre, Ofrenda a los señores Don Prudencio y Doña Manuela Zavala de Tenorio*. Here the word “ofrenda” denotes not just the gift but the ties of mutual affinity that it implies. Octavio Zorilla, the presumed editor of the collection, gives primacy to friendship and its corresponding duty to accompany the family in their grief:

El primero de los deberes de la amistad es la consecuencia, la primera de las cualidades del hombre, la sensibilidad. Persuadidos de estas verdades no hemos podido menos que condescender con los deseos de nuestra alma, cumpliendo con un deber sagrado de la amistad, los que fueron honrados con ella, y cediendo a los impulsos de su corazón los que aunque no

disfrutaron de esa amistad, supieron no obstante dar cabida al dolor en su pecho, para llorar juntamente con vosotros, el sensible fallecimiento de vuestra tierna hija. (Zorilla v-vi)

Friendship obligates the soul to respond. For the nineteenth-century writer, friendship was a special bond, akin to virtue, imbued with an aura of sacredness.

This public performance of sentiment and the exaltation of the bonds of affinity for someone with whom the editors did not share kinship ties could be understood as a display of genteel “manners.” A vestige of European Enlightenment thinking, the term “did not simply mean proper etiquette or correct deportment; it connoted ideas of individual morality and personal character, suggesting a strong connection between private values and public behavior” (Zagarri 201). Similarly, the etiquette surrounding mourning practices in the memorials published for *señoritas* exalted this sense of duty to console on the part of the poets and editors who dedicated their compilations to the bereaved parents and siblings of the deceased. The public demonstration of refined accompaniment in grief involving a print product showcased the family’s status as cultural elites since literacy was not widespread in the period of time covered by this study.

The very practice of publishing a book or chapbook for a small, select group of mourners reified the deceased family and the contributor’s upper-class identity. Ethnic identity (White-European in origin) was conspicuously displayed in the words describing the physical appearance of the dearly departed. In lyrical fashion, the poets revealed their subject’s European descent when highlighting their skin tone, and eye, and hair color. Yucatecan María Rosado y Lizardi is described as “un angel de luz... blondo el cabello...” (Mateos, n.p.). Cuban Virginia Baker (d. 1873) is a “virgen de dorados rizos” and “la rubia doncella” (Julián González Torres, 12). Peruvian Virginia Puccio (d. 1896) is a “Virgen de cabellos de oro / Y de miradas azules...” (Niño 11). María Rita Guzmán’s (d. 1884) elegist combines notions of purity with her skin color:

Aún recuerdo, buscando en la memoria,  
ya que consuelos no, calma ilusoria,  
la célica expresión de tu semblante,  
cuya casta blancura  
el lirio de la selva envidiaría. (Mádan y García 40)

The writers conflate honor and racial purity with skin color and social status. In the case of Cuba, we find a deliberate process of population whitening in the interior of the island in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Domínguez demonstrates how Spanish naturalist Ramón de la Sagra’s descriptions of the island construct one that is “atlántica, ‘blanca,’ y no antillana” (145).<sup>12</sup> The social control of women was instrumental in this project and, as in the above elegy, their characteristics were often juxtaposed with descriptions of nature. Domínguez notes this tendency in de la Sagra’s account of his interior voyages: “Dentro del proyecto de poblamiento y blanqueamiento del interior, la naturaleza y la mujer se convierten en piezas claves y organizan el sentido del relato” (157). In the literary field, Cirilio

Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) served to “promote blanqueamiento as part of a broader national narrative” (Guevara 106). The memorials consulted privilege whiteness, linking it to social position and sexual purity.

The elegies' portrayal of grief and consolation mirror many of the themes found in nineteenth-century English and American mourning publications. However, while Benjamin Franklin famously satirizes the genre in the eighteenth century for its exaggerated formalism, its contrived language, and excessive piety, in the milieu of Spanish American cultural-elites, the elegy is still a viable and respected form of consolation and remembrance in the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, even among the liberal and bohemian writers of the country represented, the elegy functions essentially as what Cavitch would describe as a “form of conservative custodial remembrance” (17). The collections preserve customs, rituals, and relationships among the cultural elites, and consolidate those links through collective mourning.

It is within the neoclassical expression, a reference to a time when funeral rites were a communal as well as a spiritual matter, that the elegy imbues its credibility in the circles of cultural elites in the nineteenth century. The practice of reciting elegies at the gravesite or *epicedio*, is recalled in these memorials and thereby documents the erasure of funeral traditions perhaps now considered passé or too sentimental for our postmodern, de-centered world. In that space and time, accompanying the family to the loved one's final resting place solidified affiliations of respect through the communal closure of the person's life, creating new memories of solidarity among the living.

From a literary perspective, the elegies in the *Corona Fúnebre* also register the transition from neoclassical formulaic poetry to romanticism, and ultimately, the Hispanic modernism that would emerge fully with Ruben Darío's *Azul* (1888). The poets who practice the elegy towards the middle of the nineteenth century do not embrace modernist tendencies of experimentation in language and images but conform to the formula of alternating lines of dactylic hexameter and pentameter associated with the elegy. The images, metaphors, and symbols employed conform to essentialist notions of feminine attributes and gender-codified behaviors. Words such as purity, virtuous, innocent, virgin, and angel abound for women; men who lead virtuous lives as politicians, teachers or physicians are also honored and remembered in this manner, although it is their citizenship, promise, and generosity that are often accentuated.

The language of flowers becomes a standard discourse as poets construct metaphors and similes to compare their subjects to them. The favorites, azucenas (Madona lily) and lilies, signify their purity and virtue. Gertrudis Tenorio Zavala (1843-1925), a locally celebrated Yucatecan poet who is asked to contribute some words of comfort, although admitting not knowing the deceased, resorts to the language of flowers, images that the emerging Spanish American modernists would categorize as “anquilosis” or stagnation: language needing to be rescued of its “tópica y mostrenca expresividad” (Olivio Jiménez 16). Thus, in what would later be considered a clichéd image, the poetic voice links the olfactory sensorial remembrance associated with flowers and the virtue of purity:

Yo no la conocí; pero me cuentan  
 Que era muy inocente y candorosa,  
 Más pura que el perfume de los lirios  
 Más pura que el perfume de las rosas. (Tenorio Zavala n.p.)

Tenorio Zavala also ascribes a regional identity to the young woman (Rosado y Lizardi) and references a geographical place when she writes:

Que por eso esa virgen del Anáhuac,  
 De noble faz y delicadas formas,  
 Esa flor de los bosques mexicanos,  
 Marchitada al calor de nuestra zona,  
 Partió de nuestro mundo desgraciado  
 Para habitar regiones más hermosas. (n.p.)

As in the previous memorial, we are provided very little information about these young women's lives, except that they were often connected to important men. Maria Rosado's paternal grandfather was Eulogio Rosado, a famous general of the caste wars in Yucatán. Her memorial differs from the one for Pilar Tenorio, however, in that it contains reproductions of newspaper eulogies and a feature not found in any others read so far: a three-act play that re-enacts the circumstances surrounding Maria's death: "María. Cuadro dramático en tres actos." The scenario creates an aura of mystery, since it remains unclear how she dies. The mother refers to herself as "el tallo de aquella flor" (Santa-María n.p.).

While the flowers gain symbolic import in depicting both innocence and sensuality, agony and resignation unite with the discourse of consolation in these verses. In Modesto Medina's description of Clorinda Dupuch (d. 1867), the poetic voice resorts to a conjuring and repetitious, "Tú." She is not named but is described as having eyes as blue as the sky, and contrasted with a noncorporeal being:

Tú, la de dulces miradas,  
 La de ojos color de cielo,  
 La de pestañas rizadas,  
 La que en cejas, enarcadas,  
 Ostentaba el terciopelo.

Tú, la de labios de rosa  
 Que perfumaba la brisa  
 Cuando sencilla y dichosa,  
 Entreabría candorosa  
 Tu boca dulce sonrisa.

Tú, tan bella y tan querida,  
 Anjel (sic) de luz y candor,  
 Emprendiste tu partida

Dejando esta maldecida  
Tierra de luto y dolor. (28)

Flowers serve as a trope for the mother's inconsolability:

Huérfana de la fortuna,  
Llorando a solas sin calma,  
En la fosa y en la cuna  
Se han deshojado una a una,  
Las blancas flores de su alma. (31)

The Peruvian-born daughter of Juana Manuela Gorriti, the Argentinian biographer and writer, Dupuch dies of a mysterious cause. Her *Corona Fúnebre* is distinguished by the high proportion of women who contribute elegies to the memorial. These are women who become celebrated writers: the Peruvian poet Carolina Freyre, María Josefa Mujía, a Bolivian poet known as “la Ciega,” and Mercedes Belzú de Dorado, who was Clorinda's half-sister. Clorinda's memorial also diverges from others in that it includes an *epicedio* that is dedicated to an unknown Srta. Florinda Anderson. The friend must have been important to the deceased because she receives equal attention in the last stanza, which seeks to console the mother:

Madre! Tenéd el abundoso llanto  
Y tu Florinda, que su amiga fuiste;  
Deja de estar apesurada y triste.  
Ella te aguarda en el celeste Eden.  
Tu eres ángel como ella, peregrino  
En este mundo de mentidas galas,  
Al fin brillantes se abrirán tus alas,  
Y unida a ella vivirás también. (Valdez 34-35)

The final verses of the elegy bequeath the domestic angel ideology to another young woman. Florinda is described as a pilgrim, having to navigate a deceptive world, but expected to carry the torch of virtue and sexual purity to later gain the reward of unification with her friend in heaven. This elegy, like many others circulated in the *Corona Fúnebre*, dedicated to deceased, young, unmarried women, normalized gender expectations of moral purity and virtue, becoming one more arbiter of proper female behavior and identity in nineteenth-century Spanish America.

Despite the fact that it is not the topic of this study, it is important to note that the memorials dedicated to married women whose prominent husbands were dutifully consoled, also disseminated appropriate roles and expectations for them. The *Corona Fúnebre* compiled for Sra. Juana Diez Gutiérrez de Diez Gutiérrez (d. 1893), wife of Mexican General Carlos Diez, describes her as “Llena de vida y de juventud la hermosa dama, era el encanto de su hogar, la adoración de su esposo y de sus hijos, el consuelo de los desgraciados y el amparo de todos los que ocurrían a ella en solicitud de sus bondades, que con tanta benevolencia prodigaba” (Rivero 3).

By the early twentieth century, the codifying expectations for married women are so ingrained as a leitmotif of the memorials that they become solidified in a title published in Costa Rica: *Corona fúnebre a la memoria de la virtuosa señora María Cristina Rojas de Herdocia, modelo de nuestra época como excelente hija, fiel esposa y solítica madre Cristiana* (1925). Although most of the collections embrace a Christian world-view, there is evidence to suggest that it was also practiced to honor non-Christian wives. Estela De A. Jesurun (d. 1864), for example, is remembered by those in a local Jewish community in Caracas, Venezuela.<sup>14</sup>

Both categories of women epitomized an ideal or virtue worthy of laudatory remembrances, but it is the young, unmarried women's deaths that confronts the reader with a truncated life, signifying a loss of intellectual promise and reproductive/amorous potential. Concurrently, the memorials note the parental longing for the virtuous, obedient daughter.

### Conclusion

The elegies and eulogies written mostly by men in the *Corona Fúnebre* constructed female identity in terms of family obligation (to either father or mother), their adherence to moral virtue, as well as positioning them as objects of desire and romantic-erotic/reproductive potential. The deceased women could not speak for themselves and were now spoken for in this process of re-memorizing by the writers who, at times, re-activated the women's bodies in the space of recent, lived memory. Consequently, the memorials offer a glimpse into the lives of women, shedding some light onto their emerging roles in society.

Although the anonymous editor, A. B. C. commented that "youth has no history," the publication of these memorials by their family members, friends, and local poets resulted in procuring a place in the historical record for these *señoritas*. The *Corona Fúnebre* and its collections of encomiums, elegies, and biographies, provide insights into youth culture and the particular mores and gender expectations reigning over their lives. The ones studied in this essay delve into the moral expectations and experiences of these upper-class young women of the cultural elite. The poetic language used to portray them and how they lived lives of significance by the people who loved and admired them varies, although there are some literary conventions that are common to many memorials. However, they reveal an alternative, forgotten past where as women's roles progressively change in society, young women are recognized for their actual achievements: Camerina Pavón Oviedo (Mexico City) was a published, local celebrity poet, and Virginia Puccio (Chiclayo) was an accomplished harpist in her native Peru. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century young women were indeed earning their place in history.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> There are at least 18 *Corona Fúnebre* titles dedicated to *señoritas* in Spanish America listed in WorldCatalog.org. I was able to access all but three. The earliest one is at the British National Library published in memory of Srta. Josefa Baptista (Merida, Venezuela 1854). A third of the surviving *Corona Fúnebre* titles studied here are originally from Cuba. Prior to 1898, Cuba was still a Spanish colony, however, it was geopolitically and culturally identified with Latin America. None were found in WorldCatalog.org for Brazil. For Argentina, there are a few dedicated to men. Discussed in this essay is one published in Peru and dedicated to the Argentinian Juana Manuela Gorriti on the death of her daughter, Clorinda Dupuch (1867). As noted in a previous article about the *Corona Fúnebre* in Mexico, the publications are chapbooks that gathered mostly elegies, “unedited verses as well as newspaper articles, short biographies, and gravesite eulogies dedicated to the deceased” (Zalduondo 236). The earlier collections are limited to elegies and eulogies. As the nineteenth century progresses, they include obituaries, short biographies, and photographs. The author wishes to thank the Appalachian College Association’s Faculty Research Fellowship Summer 2020 for supporting this research.

<sup>2</sup> Some in this study were offered to the mother of Nemecia González y Sardón, Prisca Martínez y Arredondo, and Clorinda Dupuch (whose mother is Juana Manuela Gorriti, 1818-1892). Beatriz Urraca asserts that, “[d]uring her lifetime, she (Gorriti) was the most widely read woman writer throughout Latin America” (151). In the 1860s, when Clorinda dies, Gorriti is known for numerous articles and short stories. Her hosting of literary salons is also well known, making her an influential cultural presence in Lima where Dupuch’s memorial was published. Some fathers also appear as compilers: In 1884, Venezuelan physician Domingo de Montbrun gathers the elegies and obituaries for his daughter, Carmen Luisa, who dies in Trinidad where the family resided; Agustín Cruz, the Secretario-Contador for the city of Lajas, Cuba, does the same for his daughter Laudelina (d. 1894). The author would like to thank the generous librarians at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Kansas, and Yale University for making the *Corona Fúnebre* memorials available for consultation.

<sup>3</sup> Carmen Luisa de Monbrun’s 1883 *Corona Fúnebre* is a fine example of this, as it includes a photograph of the young woman and features print graphic design images of Greek classical figures on some of its pages.

<sup>4</sup> Unlike an elegy, which is a poem, a eulogy is a narrative or speech in praise of a deceased person.

<sup>5</sup> “Era tiempo de que cosechare el fruto de sus virtudes, y el Señor la llamó a su seno para que ocupase un lugar entre sus vírgenes” (A.B.C. 7). Although it is not within the scope of this essay, it is important to note that there are important differences between Protestant consolation strategies and those of Roman Catholic origin. While the Roman Catholic imagination may relegate young women to a chorus of virgins in heaven, for example, this allegory does not exist in the Protestant tradition.

<sup>6</sup> Sinués de Marco’s *El ángel del hogar* (1859) and her essays in Spanish American journals disseminated this doctrine. For a discussion of the ideology in nineteenth-century Spanish America, please consult Nancy LaGreca’s *Rewriting Womanhood: Feminism, Subjectivity, and the Angel of the House in the Latin American Novel, 1887-1903*.

<sup>7</sup> I have corrected the diacritical errors in the nineteenth-century texts but have maintained those that constitute spelling errors and noted their change in spelling: májico for mágico and virjen for virgen.

<sup>8</sup> In Jorge Isaac's *María* (1867), we find a similar juxtaposition in Efraín's description of María: "Niña cariñosa y risueña, mujer tan pura y seductora como aquellas con quienes (sic) yo había soñado..." (16). While it may have been a familiar depiction of desired women in nineteenth-century romantic/sentimental narratives, it is an unusual characterization to transfer to consolation literature when the family is invested in the promise of an afterlife for their loved one. The author would like to appreciate Dr. Naomi Lindstrom for her insightful comments and recommendations.

<sup>9</sup> Literally, in some publications "Hacedor," a term associated with Masonic members.

<sup>10</sup> The verses are paraphrased from Malherbe's "Consolation." Translated by Longfellow, the last two lines of the fourth stanza read: "A rose, she too hath lived as long live the roses, / The space of one brief morn" ([www.allpoetry.com](http://www.allpoetry.com)). Malherbe was the official poet of Henry IV and Louis XIII, a "theoretician whose insistence upon strict form, restraint, and purity of diction prepared the way for French Classicism" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

<sup>11</sup> On the last page of María Rita Guzmán's *Corona Fúnebre* (1885), there is a statement to that effect under the heading "Regalo a los suscritores (sic). La Redacción de El RAMILLETE ofrece esta Corona Fúnebre a la memoria de la distinguida señorita María Rita Guzmán" (Madán y García n.p.).

<sup>12</sup> Domínguez notes how de la Sagra diverges from Alexander Von Humbolt's (1769-1859) cartographic voyage account of the island, which depicts it as inherently Afro-Cuban and culturally tied to the Antilles.

<sup>13</sup> For Benjamin Franklin's caustic injunction, please consult the seventh Silence Dogwood letter published in *The New England Courant* (1722).

<sup>14</sup> The *Corona Fúnebre a la memoria de la señora Estela de A. Jesurun* (1864) was published by the Imprenta Independiente. I am grateful to the Maduro Foundation of Curaçao for making this collection available for consultation. One memorial to a famous *señora* not found in WorldCat is the one dedicated to Argentine poet Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta, who dies in 1888. It can be accessed through Wikimedia Commons. There are no *Corona Fúnebre* publications listed for *señoritas* in the catalogues of either the National Library of Argentina or Uruguay, although they do exist for important men. Argentine writer Manuel Baldomero Ugarte (1875-1951) edits one for Teodelina Cano in 1891, but there is no information regarding her marital status in the title, nor current access to the publication.

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