

Corona Fúnebre: The “New” Elegiac Tradition in Mexico

María Zalduondo
Bluefield College

In 19th-century Spanish America¹ the *Corona Fúnebre* (Funeral Wreath) promoted a new elegiac tradition that gained popularity within the cultural and political elite in Mexico and served to articulate a national *criollo* consciousness.² The elegies and prose tributes usually included in the collection not only memorialized the deceased but also served as public platforms to highlight the virtues of the ideal citizen. In this study, I argue that the various manifestations of the Mexican *Corona Fúnebre* served as a modern, democratic elegy marking the transition between religious and secular articulations of loss as well as documenting elite challenges and aspirations in the emerging nation.³ No longer the purview of Spanish

¹ A search of WorldCat did not offer any examples of a *Corona Fúnebre* published in Brazil.

² The author wishes to thank the Appalachian College Association for a 2016 faculty summer grant that facilitated archival research in Mérida, Yucatán, as well as Dr. Wayne Massey for his suggestions and comments.

³ The *Corona Fúnebre* is *sui generis* in Spanish America and was published and dedicated to a myriad of its citizens. WorldCat and HathiTrust have several of them available online and others are found in the particular country's national library; countries that published them include Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Spain. Mexico dedicated one to the U.S. Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant (1885), referring to him as a “friend of Mexico.” President Benito Juárez is honored and

royalty or the aristocracy, both public and private circulations of the *Corona Fúnebre* honored citizens whose lives exemplified the ideals of good character and virtue without resorting to religious rhetoric directly associated with the Catholic church. The autochthonous publications, which included elegies or mournful poems lamenting a person's death, traditionalized remembrances in book form by collecting biographies, newspaper articles, chronicles of funeral rites, and obituaries, as well as verses. The theme of the importance of youth in securing a successful future for the equally nascent society often accompanied lamentations about the eulogized citizens who influenced them in life and were now deceased. Those who met an untimely death and had contributed to the building of the young republic were especially lamented and remembered.

Following this practice, Mexican politician José María Mata y Reyes (1819–1895) ends the introduction to Pedro Escobedo's 1844 *Corona Fúnebre* by stating:

nosotros lloramos tu partida; y desde esa mansión divina en que te hallas, dirige tus miradas hacia México, tu patria querida, y por cuyo engrandecimiento tanto te afanaste. Pide al Eterno por la felicidad del país que te vio nacer, de este país que podrá decir con noble orgullo: ¡Escobedo fue hijo mío! (20)

Similarly, poet Miguel Mata y Reyes concatenates personal loss with a nation's sorrow in "Consuelo a la amistad:"

Lloraré con la patria entristecida
El estragon fatal de un bien perdido;
Ella deplora un bienhechor constante,
Y yo un virtuoso, fiel y tierno amigo. (24)

remembered in one published by his native Oaxaca (1872). I have chosen to concentrate on those published in 19th-century Mexico because they document the country's transition from Republic to Restored Republic well, although 20th-century *Corona Fúnebres* exist. From 2001–2004, several were compiled by Valentín López González in Cuernavaca and published by Cuadernos Históricos Morelenses, in honor of local celebrities. The first one is dedicated to a benefactor of the arts, Carlos de la Sierra, who died that year. In this essay, which is part of a larger book project, I have chosen not to discuss tributes dedicated to military men and politicians in Mexico.

J. M. Mata y Reyes’ tribute to Escobedo utilizes the imagery of a heavenly, divine mansion that awaits the supposedly deserving physician. References to an Eternal Being (el *Eterno*) are found, but no direct mention of a biblical heaven or God appears. Escobedo is hailed as a consummate patriot who garners the praise of a grateful nation that proudly declared him her son. In his elegy, M. Mata y Reyes gathers the sentiment of a collective national mourning and ends the stanza by personalizing the loss experienced when one misses a “virtuous, faithful and tender friend.” In this manner, contributors to Escobedo’s *Corona Fúnebre* exalted his life and work to harness the idea of the true potential of the nation.

However, the *Corona Fúnebre* did not resort to imaginative scenarios to outline national projects as Doris Sommer finds in the 19th-century novels she studies in *Foundational Fictions* (1993). Indeed, in Sommer’s work these narratives unite *eros* and *polis* to solidify alliances among different sectors of society. For Sommer, even “Latin American histories during the nation-building period tend to be more projective than retrospective, more erotic than data-driven” (26). Instead, the published elegies exposed an existential angst and attempted to reconcile temporal tensions between *thánatos* (death) and *polis* (the state). As most of the eulogized and remembered met an untimely end, the *Corona Fúnebre* situated and centralized the urgency of societal change in the national consciousness.⁴ The cold reality of death, which led to the permanent truncation of the individual’s life, work, and aspirations, served as a reflection for the nation’s own struggles. Thus, it was through the experience of *thánatos* that the survivors of the deceased—often part of the cultural and political elite—immortalized the memory of their loved ones through stylized elegies and eloquent prose but also sought to comment on the state of national affairs in the texts.

Although they appeared throughout Spanish America, I will focus on four Mexican *Corona Fúnebres* dedicated to non-military/political citizens that surfaced between 1844–1880 because they cover a historical period that includes the increased secularization of Mexican society and the diminished influence of the Catholic church in matters of life (births, weddings, etc.) and death (funeral rites). The plethora of Mexican *Corona Fúnebres* available for commentary today outnumber those available from

⁴ The subjects analyzed for this study met untimely deaths: Pedro Escobedo (1789–1844), Clemente Cantarell (1853–1873), Pilar Tenorio Zavala (1850–1866), and Cristina Farfán de García Montero (1846–1880).

other countries where there was not a similar rejection of the Eurocentric spiritual leaders of the country.⁵

The *Corona Fúnebre del Sr. Dn. Pedro Escobedo* in which the brothers Mata y Reyes publically expressed their grief included but was not limited to the traditional elegies or lyric poems lamenting the death of a friend, relative, or public figure. Escobedo's elegant elegy, the earliest on record, also featured fancy graphic designs and a charcoaled portrait of the young surgeon, a rare addition. Writing about the custom in Mérida, Cicero Mac-Kinney states that the *coronas* began to circulate as "cuadernillos" or chapbooks after a group of poets and intellectuals gathered the material paying tribute to the deceased (190). The publication often gathered unedited verses as well as newspaper articles, short biographies, and gravesite eulogies dedicated to the deceased. Stored in personal libraries by the cultural elite, the *Corona Fúnebre* often documented the important writers and journalists of the time. As Mac-Kinney notes, "podrían tomarse como antologías luctuosas dada la calidad de los autores de sus textos" (190). Many of the young poets and writers found in these pages later became significant cultural or political actors in their region.

Unlike authors of the Christian-influenced precursor *oración fúnebre* or "funeral prayer," the compilers of *coronas* gravitated towards a more secular and stylized expression of grief.⁶ Christian ideals of an afterlife still permeated some of the strategies of consolation usually present in elegies but they shared space with republican ideals of democracy and patriotic pride. Neo-classical literary references and contemporary social commentary also entered into these publications whose mournful expressions and mood depended on the region in which they were published and the gender of the deceased. As we shall see, the *Corona Fúnebre* dedicated to a young liberal male journalist captures an ironic critique of the state of affairs of the medical profession, whereas the ones dedicated to young women in Mérida steer away from social commentary and focus on their virtues.

⁵ In Peru, for example, Catholicism was the religion of the land until the Constitution of 1920.

⁶ A parody of the *oración fúnebre* is José Joaquín Fernández Lizardi's *Oración fúnebre dedicada a la buena memoria del difunto Cenzontillo* (1824). A more traditional one is dedicated to the priest Manuel Bolea Sánchez de Tagle (1738–1813) by Francisco Roxas y Andrade: *Oración fúnebre, predicada en el convento imperial de N.P. Sto. Domingo de México, el día 19 de julio 1813* (1813).

The spread of print capitalism and newspapers facilitated the publication of the *Corona Fúnebre* as a conduit for making both grief and commemoration a public affair. As Antonio Benítez-Rojo observes, Mexico had a long journalistic history since “(p)rinting had been introduced in 1539; the university had been founded in 1553; and the city had become the first American center of book publishing” (203). The newspaper *El Siglo XIX* (1841–1896) often published articles as well as obituaries about notable men. The articles that appeared in *El Siglo* honoring Escobedo are reprinted in his *Corona Fúnebre*. The liberal publication published poetry and essays on topics such as democracy, education, and politics. The elite network of friendships among those in the arts, journalism, and the sciences is evident in Escobedo’s published tribute.

At 120 pages, Escobedo’s *Corona Fúnebre* is the longest of the four included in this study. A philanthropist, physician, surgeon, and subsequent founder of the School of Medicine, he is honored in a format and publication genre that signaled a new elegiac tradition in Mexico and the rest of Spanish America. The publication is a who’s who of important members of the medical community as well as recognized 19th-century writers and poets. Manuel Payno writes a short biography called “Recuerdos de D. Pedro Escobedo” (86-97) and renders a touching recreation of his time with the dying man, whom he visits in Jalapa on behalf of his friends in the capital. Poet Guillermo Prieto summarizes the salient characteristics of the man echoed by other accounts in his elegiac poem “A Escobedo, Un Recuerdo” (98-99). The narrative voice recounts the surgeon’s intelligence, his good soul, contributions to science, noble charity, and beneficence. His final exhortation—“Grandes del mundo, aprended!”—signals to Escobedo’s significance (99). The quotation marks placed around this last line parallel a common thread found in Escobedo’s *Corona Fúnebre*. The contributors remark that he was a man to be emulated, a great teacher and surgeon who cared for the poor and administered to their needs.

The virtues ascribed to Escobedo are linked to Christian values embraced by both liberals and conservatives in a quest to activate national conciliation and progress.⁷ José María Yturralde concatenates the two

⁷ Social commentary on the divisive state of the nation abounds in the tributes to a man who was admired by both liberals and conservatives. Although Mexico had gained its independence in 1821, it was not until 1824 that the First Mexican Republic was proclaimed. As a surgeon and physician, Escobedo worked to serve

ideas when he writes “Que premio a la virtud concede el cielo” (“Al Sr. D. Pedro Escobedo En Señal de Amistad y Gratiud,” in Escobedo 99). Similarly, José María Tornel remarks that the physician was a talented observer, whose principal virtue was *la beneficencia* or charity. For the eulogist, Escobedo’s creed of peace and health made him worthy of being an apostle of the Church. Because of Escobedo’s compassion and works of charity, the writer compares him to Christ, a reflection of “la Divinidad” (“Biografía. Rasgos Característicos de Don Pedro Escobedo,” in Escobedo 10-11). In “Honosres Fúnebres,” the anonymous writer of *El Siglo XIX* binds citizenship to virtue by stating that “Las virtudes privadas son la base de las públicas . . . Aquellas virtudes son acreedoras al aprecio de los ciudadanos; porque no habrá ciudadanos si no ecsisten [sic] esas virtudes” (Escobedo 100). Escobedo garners deserving accolades because he is perceived as the epitome of the virtuous citizen. Significantly, the writer elevates the healer and philanthropist to the level of a national symbol of inspiration when he does not mention Escobedo’s name, but refers to him simply as an “hombre de bien” (100-103). His death signals a great loss to the nation and those who were his students, patients, and friends. His work with and influence upon youth and promising students of medicine is especially recounted in the mournful eulogies at his gravesite. This practice of taking the reader along to the gravesite of the departed marked the end of the mortal journey and served to finalize the experience of loss and impermanency.

Elegists and eulogists consolidated their public personae and acquired national and/or regional fame. Their participation in the funeral rites and printed presence earned them a particular kind of earthly immortality. For Salvatore Poeta, who argues for the functional transcendency of the elegy, at the heart of the elegy is the “Principio de Permanencia” (principle of permanency) whereby the elegy emerges as a contestation, a mournful protest by humans confronting their mortality, absent corporeality, and

his countrymen, liberal and conservative, equally. At a time when factionalism lingered, Escobedo was remembered by Navarro é Ibarra as a friend of all: “el apego tenaz a ciertos dogmas políticos, esa intolerancia mezquina de los principios ajenos [sic], eran sentimientos desconocidos al que había nacido hijo de la verdad y amigo de todos los hombres” (“Don Pedro Escobedo,” in Escobedo 8). An advocate of the sciences, he is also credited with important and radical reforms in medical education (8-9).

something he calls the mysteries of “el más allá.” Permanency’s reciprocal nature is discussed as the elegist is immortalized through the recognition of the deceased. Gerhard Joseph refers to this symbiotic relationship as an exotic cannibalism since “ya que para que el canto fúnebre conceda al poeta su fama terrenal será necesario que el elegista ‘consume’ el cuerpo del muerto (y el espíritu del muerto residirá activa y permanentemente en la psique del sobreviviente” (Poeta 61). The *Corona Fúnebre* immortalized or imparted fame on the participants who remembered or metaphorically consumed those who had passed on.

The elegy’s origins date to the middle of the seventh century B.C., making it one of the oldest genres in poetry. The funeral elegy flourished in England from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century (Weisman 5). Lorna Clymer remarks that the English funeral elegy integrated the three main concerns of “lament, praise, and consolation,” as well as “two kinds of immediacy, one spatial and the other temporal.” She further elaborates by stating: Whether real or imagined, the spatial proximity of the corpse and the temporal proximity of the recent death and funeral provoke a circumscribed and potentially intensified elegiac focus” (170-171). The four *Corona Fúnebres* studied here present elegies that follow a similar pattern of lament and praise. However, Christian consolation is not always the prescribed, anticipated resolution. Published tributes in the Americas also differed from those in Spain in terms of content, purpose, and to whom they were dedicated.

The Spanish-American antecedents of the *Corona Fúnebre* may be found in the motherland where it was a duly authorized—that is, licensed—book that served to honor members of the aristocracy. The 1830 publication in honor of the “Exma Sra. Doña María de la Piedad Roca de Togores,” otherwise known as the “Duquesa de Frias y de Ulceda, Marquesa de Villena etc etc,” features only elegies in verse form (sonnets, octaves, odes, romances) and is the earliest example available. The collection begins with an “Advertencia” and explains that it intentionally did not reprint newspaper articles of the duchess’s death but rather chose to focus on the elegiac poetry: “A los que no leyeron los indicados artículos, ni tuvieron la dicha de tratar a aquella malograda señora, la dara [sic] bastante a conocer la Colección de poesias que publicamos en elogio suyo” (*Corona* 7). The verses are printed in order of submission or date of publication so as not to offend aristocratic sensibilities, with the last *Soneto Gratulatorio* entered by the grieving spouse, el Duque de Frias. While this publication shares the words *Corona Fúnebre* in its title, it is

clear that once the practice crosses the Atlantic it becomes more democratic, and not the purview of royalty.⁸ On the contrary, in the Spanish Americas the *Corona Fúnebre* is offered not only to extraordinary citizens such as generals, doctors, and lawyers but also to virtually unknown young writers and women who did not live long enough to accomplish great feats but were associated with the cultural elite.

Such is the case of Clemente Cantarell (1855–1874), a young journalist from Yucatán who spent the last months of his short life in Mexico City. Cantarell is memorialized in a sixty-three-page encomium gathered by a fellow journalist and bohemian writers in the Mexico City of 1874. He is described as the “youthful editor of the *Eco de Ambos Mundos*” (Escobedo 28). In the few months that the Yucatecan contributed to the periodical, he garnered the admiration of his readers and colleagues for his “frank and vigorous” style of writing. One admiring journalist comments: “Cantarell’s death is a nation’s loss; the hope of Mexico is in her rising generation and the surviving youthful aspirants in journalism and letters” (Escobedo 28).⁹

Cantarell’s *Corona Fúnebre* includes reprinted notices of his death in various newspapers, articles eulogizing the young writer, and elegies published in local journals. All address the somber nature of his untimely death. One exception to this mournful tone is Antenor Lescano’s opening “Apuntes biográficos.” In what is a seemingly inopportune, sardonic critique of the state of medical services in Mexico City, Lescano (a fellow co-editor of *El Eco de Ambos Mundos*) declares that Cantarell did not die of a terrible pneumonia but “Murió de médicos” (Lescano 5). Lescano

⁸ In 1878, a *Corona Fúnebre* dedicated to Queen Doña María de las Mercedes (Orleans and Bourbon) appears in the newspaper *La Academia* in Madrid and Barcelona (by editors Emilio Oliver and company). By then the tradition had been exercised in the Americas for over thirty years and perhaps influenced the content of the Spanish version as to who was allowed to pay tribute to the monarch. One of the elegies dedicated to the queen is by a thirteen-year-old girl by the name of Esperanza Gallego y del Busto (“Ante el sepulcro” 11), who is later anthologized in an 1880 publication *Escritoras españolas contemporáneas*. See pp. 147-148 for her poems “El Suicida” and “Soledades.”

⁹ This quotation by an unknown journalist of *The Two Republics* appears in English and is not translated, leading this author to believe that many of the Mexico City cultural and political elite read the language. I believe, but was unable to verify, that the title of the journal was probably *The Two Republics*. This could be a misprint or act of mischief on the part of the compilers.

repeats this conclusion in a reenacted dialogue between the bohemian friends who were gathered one afternoon and noticed Cantarell’s absence. One friend comments on Cantarell’s illness and the fact that he was being treated by practitioners of allopathy:

Alópatas?

Alópatas.

Pues entonces no digamos que Cantarell muere de pulmonía.

De qué entonces?

De médicos.

Inmediatamente que Cantarell *hizo cama*, según la frase técnica del vulgo, comenzaron las sangrías, los sinapismos, los vejigatorios, la cantárida y las medicinas en altas dosis. El enfermo murió, como dijo el bohemio, de médicos, como ha estado sacrificándose al sistema alópatico, la pobre humanidad, siglo tras siglo. (6)

This ludic, picaresque tone continues as Lescano describes Cantarell’s economic situation and that of most young bohemian writers of the time:

¡Pobre Clemente Cantarell!

. . . Cantarell ingresó en la bohemia que en esos días redactaba el ‘Eco.’ Le abrimos nuestros brazos y nuestros corazones, desgraciadamente no podíamos abrirle nuestros bolsillos . . . Estaban, están y estarán vacíos . . . Le brindamos cuanto teníamos, el sentimiento de lo bello, las aspiraciones del porvenir y la alegre perspectiva de nuestras esperanzas futuras, partimos con él cuanto teníamos, nuestras miserias y nuestros dolores. (7)

Even in death, the bohemian penchant for satire and condemnation of Mexican institutions and practices find themselves in an otherwise somber tribute. Of note is that thirty years after Escobedo’s *Corona Fúnebre*, the field of medicine was not held in high esteem but rejected as inadequate and dangerous.¹⁰ Cantarell’s death provided the impetus to expose

¹⁰ Manuel Carpio, vice-rector of the San Ildefonso at the time of Pedro Escobedo’s death, writes an eloquent “Elogio Fúnebre” for his colleague (60-70). He makes it a point to place Escobedo’s politics squarely in the center: “su opinion política era el justo medio” (67). He elaborates with classical references: “si hubiera vivido en la antigua Roma, ni habría sido amigo de los Gracos ni tampoco de

deficiencies in the nation's health practices. It is in the elegies that we encounter his colleagues' appreciation for Cantarrell's lost talent.

Francisco Cósmes's elegy is the first to appear after a series of reprinted eulogies. The young poet emphasizes Cantarrell's potential contribution to the nation:

Cuando en tu frente de vate
 La inspiración germinaba
 Cuando eran tus sueños, lauros
 Que alcanzar para tu patria. (37)

He ends with a note of solidarity referring to him as a brother while uniting those friends living in a mutual display of sorrow and farewell:

Hermano, los que partimos
 Contigo la vida amarga,
 Los que quedamos aquí
 Sin esperanza y sin calma
 Al depositar tus restos
 Sobre esa tumba sagrada
 Te mandamos desde lo íntimo
 Del corazón nuestras lágrimas
 Adiós! Oh tú que el primero
 Desciendes a esta morada!
 ¡Adiós hermano, descansa! (39)

Tears elude gender specificity and virile men freely shed them. Melancholy is not the purview of women as men weep and express their profound sense of existential duress ("los que partimos/ contigo la vida amarga/Los que quedamos aquí sin esperanza y sin calma"). Unlike an obituary, the *Corona Fúnebre* included elegies that often directly addressed the departed loved one with expressions of grief, admiration, and shared remembrances.

The earliest surviving *Corona Fúnebre* dedicated to a Mexican female belongs to Pilar Tenorio Zavala (1850–1866), whose untimely death at the age of sixteen was mourned by the young poets surrounding her famous

Lucio Sylá" (67). In the *Corona Fúnebre* dedicated to Carpio upon his death in 1860, the doctor is remembered for this moving and erudite tribute.

political family.¹¹ The publication states it is an “offering” to the parents of the teen who dies of pneumonia. As a gift from friends and family to the grieving parents, it is a gesture of consolation. It may also indicate that the publication was part of a private endeavor and that its limited distribution was offered gratuitously among family and friends.

Gertrudis Tenorio Zavala (1843–1925) had already published poetry in Merida’s *El Repertorio Pintoresco* (1861–63) when she painfully took pen to paper to pay tribute to her little sister, Pilar. She dedicates the elegy “The Flower of a Sepulchre,” whose first word is an expression of agony, and begins a desolate description of the tomb in which Pilar is to repose: “¡Ay! en esta morada funeraria/En donde acaba todo y desaparece” (G. Tenorio Zavala 19). There is no effort to console, and praise is expressed through the adjective-nouns *virgen* and *tesoro* in the only direct reference to her sibling:

Una tumba abandonada
 Con mis lágrimas regué
 Era el postrimer asilo
 De la virgen a quien lloro
 En el se oculta el tesoro
 Que en la vida siempre amé. (19)

The poetic voice (which, following 19th-century convention, the reader understands to be the author’s) identifies the tomb as the location of last asylum; still deep in her grief, Gertrudis cannot image a heaven. Instead, she places the reader at the site of the tomb where she plants a flower at the *losa fría* (cold tombstone). The last stanza returns to the mournful state, hoping for an everlasting flower that keeps eternal watch and does not perish:

Y correrán tristemente
 Las lágrimas de mis ojos;
 Hasta que a su losa fría

¹¹ Pilar is the granddaughter of Lorenzo de Zavala (1788–1836). Her maternal grandfather was one of the Mexicans fighting against Santa Ana on the Texan side. He becomes Vice President of the short-lived Republic of Texas. Pilar Tenorio Zavala’s *Corona Fúnebre* is in the private collection of a descendant of the family, Mrs. María Teresa Albertus Sansores, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for making a facsimile of the work for the author’s use.

Legue por recuerdo tierno
 Otra flor que noche y día
 Vele su letargo eterno. (21)

The presence of God in the penultimate stanza is not invoked as a resolution to understanding the untimely death but as a call to avenge anyone who would remove the flower from Pilar's tomb:

Si alguno con alma osada
 En esta mansión sombría
 Olvidado de su nada,
 Hollare con planta impía
 La flor de esta tumba helada,

Si una mano cruel y airada
 Arrancare sin piedad
 La flor de su tumba helada
 Permita Diós que vengada
 Sea tan bárbara impiedad. (21)

Rita Cetina Gutiérrez (1846–1908), a budding poet at the time and close friend of the family, begins her elegy with the adjective-noun “Angel” alluding to Pilar's earthly goodness. Her beginning stanza merges praise, consolation of the hope of the afterlife and lament in four lines:

Ángel que presto abandonaste el mundo
 Para volar a la region del cielo
 Oye el canto que mi alma sin consuelo
 Por tí levanta en su dolor profundo. (25)

Cetina continues the theme of Christian consolation in the second stanza:

Tú que al lado del Diós de lo creado
 Ocupas un lugar allá en la altura,
 Gozando ya de la eternal ventura
 Que en el mundo mortal jamas ha hallado. (25)

The last stanza of her elegy elevates Pilar to the position of saint as the poet voice asks for her intercession with God:

Si mi canto hasta allá vibra doliente
 Y tu paz a turbar impío no llega,
 Por mi futuro venturanza ruega
 Al Dios que invoco con amor ferviente. (27)

Cetina’s voice opts for love of God even in the midst of sorrow. In so doing, the poet follows some of the English funeral elegy’s conventions in addressing the death of a child. As Laurence Lerner observes: “A life lived out to term can be regarded as blessed simply by seeing it as a whole and accepting that the end came when it had to, but a life cut off before it had really begun offers no such possibility of consolation. The only reassurance is that the child is now an angel” (50).

The elegies that follow are written by the Merida youth that surround Pilar and her family. Many of the young men who contributed elegies became important cultural figures (poets, etc.) or professionals. Octavio Zorilla, who became a district judge, writes the introductory remarks and ends the *Corona Fúnebre* with an elegy that he titles “Una Lágrima. Sobre la Tumba de la Señorita Pilar Tenorio Zavala.” The poetic voice infantilizes the teenager, referring to her as a “girl” who will be in the presence of God’s eternal glory. A single “sincere” tear of grief is left at the tomb site as the last remembrances of friendship are expressed:

Niña gentil que en la celeste esfera
 Gozando estás de Dios la eterna Gloria,
 Permite que en tu lápida mortuoria
 Deposite esta lágrima sincera. (90)

For Zorilla, Pilar is a celestial virgin, angel, and gentile child who was admired and whose absence will be noted among the youth of Merida. Although Pilar Tenorio’s chapbook did not overtly propose national projects, its documentation of death by pneumonia once again signals the lack of adequate health facilities in the region. The following *Corona Fúnebre* is dedicated to a woman who dies in childbirth along with her infant.

The *Corona Fúnebre* dedicated to Cristina Farfán de García Montero (1846–1880) features elegies by now famed Yucatecan poets Gertrudis Tenorio and Rita Cetina. The women respond to the death of their dear friend and colleague with whom they collaborated on important charitable

projects in Merida. The two women, who write fourteen years after Pilar Tenorio's death, by this point had established themselves as productive members of society as writers, philanthropists, and educators. Both had become educators who had very public lives as publishers of the journal *La Siempreviva*, where all three women participated in the early 1870s.

The title cover of Farfán's *Corona Fúnebre* states that it is dedicated by "sus compatriotas y amigos." This reference to "compatriots" highlights Yucatan's strong sense of regional pride. Although Farfán died in San Juan Bautista de Tabasco, she was Yucatan's daughter. Active in charitable endeavors and projects, she had labored as an art teacher and writer for *La Siempreviva* with her fellow editors, Cetina and Tenorio. Although when she died at age 34, Farfán was no longer part of the youth culture, she had been a part of the group of young people active in Merida's cultural renewal.

Dr. Fabian Carrillo Suaste writes the biography in the opening chapter of Farfán's homage.¹² Carrillo refers to her as "hija ilustre de Mérida" (section V). For him Yucatan is a sovereign entity with a history and political identity apart from that of central Mexico. When referring to her birth, he states: "A fines de los breves días de paz que siguieron a nuestra última guerra con la República Mexicana, nació en Mérida, el 24 de Julio de 1846" (Section II). These words mark some of the closest political ideas found in a tribute addressed to a woman. While most *Corona Fúnebres* dedicated to women exclusively exalt their virtues, it is the area's strong regionalism as well as Farfán's recognized contributions in arts and letters that merit these accolades in the context of significant historical moments. Merida pride is especially invoked when the author highlights her literary accomplishments in *La Siempreviva*: "ella y las otras jóvenes cultivadoras de la literatura, coronaron de laurel a la ciudad natal, hízola a esta estremecerse de alegría con la aparición del brillante grupo de poetisas, todas hijas de su seno" (Section V). Carrillo ends his biographical reflection with a visionary journey to the grave in Tabasco and offers a metaphorical cry of lamentation, twice calling out her name in a display of mournful desolation.

Cetina's "A La Memoria de Cristina" is a biographical elegy that interweaves mostly praise for her accomplishments as artist, teacher, poet,

¹² Dr. Carrillo Suaste was a public figure who delivered a speech at the 1879 *Segunda Exposición de Yucatán*. See Rodolfo G. Cantón, pp. 56-58, for more information.

and defender of charitable causes. Her earthly achievements made her the glory of *el porvenir* (prospect, future). Hyperbole is employed as it is an entire people or *pueblo* that mourns her:

Por eso ante su tumba idolatrada
Inconsolable llora un pueblo entero...
Pagando con su llanto verdadero
De gratitud la deuda más sagrada. (Cetina)

Worthy of remembrance, Cristina is a human being (*ser*) who left sweet memories in this world:

¡Ay! Yo también a su dolor profundo
Quiero mezclar mis lágrimas de duelo,
Por ese sér (*sic*) que al elevarse al cielo
Dulces memorias nos dejó en el mundo.

Although Cristina is not explicitly described as an angel, she is “elevated to heaven.” The poetic voice uses the first person subject pronoun, *yo*, to emphatically place the author as present in her display of profound grief and despair.

Gertrudis Tenorio writes of a double absence, the first one experienced when Cristina left Merida for Tabasco. Farfán is for Tenorio *a tierna poetiza, poetiza encantadora, alma pura, rosa perfumada* and “orgullo de este suelo, encanto de tu hogar!” (G. Tenorio Zavala). Characteristically, Tenorio offers no direct words of Christian consolation; instead the poetic voice acknowledges that souls such as hers will inhabit “enchanted mansions” in the afterlife:

¡Qué dulce es la memoria del sér [*sic*] que así ha vivido,
Del ángel que ha dejado recuerdo celestial!
A esa alma venturosa que el mal ha combatido
Mansiones encantadas le esperan mas allá. (September 7, 1880)

Cristina is an angel who, because of her beneficence, left celestial memories while on earth. The verses signal that Cristina’s days have passed from this “sad world” and bid her farewell:

Adios, adios, Cristina, pasaron ya tus días;

A nuestro triste mundo jamás has de volver.
 Más nunca han de perderse las gratas armonías
 Que de tu lira de oro supiste desprender.

A tí, tierna poetiza, ¡oh, rosa perfumada,
 Orgullo de este suelo, encanto de tu hogar,!
 Dedica sus recuerdos esta alma infortunada
 A tí que siempre fuiste un ángel de bondad. (September 7, 1880)

At the end of that stanza, Tenorio exalts Cristina as an accomplished poet when she metaphorically refers to her friend's "golden lyre." In the final verses, the poetic voice addresses the deceased Cristina directly: "To you, tender poet, Oh, perfumed rose!" Tenorio insinuates the trope of angel of the home when she describes Cristina as "the delight of your home." The panegyric tributes that appear in the collection continue in this spirit of respect and recognition of Farfán as writer, educator, philanthropist, wife, and illustrious daughter of Yucatan.

One notable exemption of this semi-biographical focus is Roberto Casellas Rivas's "¡Morir!" The seven-stanza elegy dedicated to the "ill-fated Yucatecan poet" invokes a naturalistic fatalism in which the verb "to die" is found as the last word in the last verse of the stanzas.¹³ In Casellas' existential reflection, all natural entities, including the sun, must die. This is the natural law of God, the poetic voice insists. Yet man suffers and is distressed at the inevitable:

Ley es natural que rige
 Cuanto de Dios ha emanado:
 ¿Por qué el hombre acongojado
 Gime y llora si le exige
 El destino despiadado
 Lo que el árbol, ave y sol
 No pudieron resistir...?
 ¿Por qué tanto ha de sufrir
 Al pasar por el cresol
 Del necesario *morir*...? (Casellas Rivas)

¹³ A notable visual difference of Casellas's elegy is the placement of an upward-starred triangle in between the stanzas, a symbol associated with the Masons.

For Casellas human fate is merciless, ruthless, and unavoidable. How else to understand the deaths of Cristina, at the age of 34, and her unborn child? Casellas’ biosocial philosophy of death reflects the social and religious thinking espoused by the emerging Freethinkers, or *Librepensadores*, opposing the dogma of the Church surrounding life’s end. According to María Fernanda Suárez Manzanero, many of these ideas were being disseminated in several journals of the period, beginning with *El Pensamiento* (1874), founded in Yucatan (43). The “naturalist religion” saw nature as the conduit by which to “view and interpret the world” with the principles of Reason at its foundation (my translation, Suárez Manzanero 42). In the last stanza of the elegy Casellas offers no Christian consolation; instead the poetic voice collapses the semantic meaning of the word glory (in Spanish, the word *gloria* is akin to “heaven”) to declare Farfán’s immortalization through earthly remembrance and hence glorification.¹⁴

These diverse verses in elegy, along with the biographical notes and eulogies found in the unnumbered pages of Farfan’s *Corona Fúnebre*, signal towards a new elegiac tradition among the cultural and political elite in Mexico that intensified the experience of subjectivity during the mourning of a loved one and often forced them to face existential anxieties regarding the finality of *thánatos*.

More than lamenting the passing of a loved one, the *Corona Fúnebre* served to facilitate self-recognition and promote the voices and agendas of the cultural elite in Mexico. Conspicuously published for both familial and public consumption, they served as a recollection of national and personal histories, documenting contemporary challenges and aspirations. Escobedo’s remembrance serves as a platform to exalt the virtues necessary to promote national consolidation and progress. Clemente Cantarell’s collection of elegies, eulogies, and tributes provides examples of how the publication advanced republican ideas and aspirations rooted

¹⁴ Suárez Manzanero notes that both Cetina and Tenorio participated in the journal *El Libre Examen* (Merida 1879–1882), which was published by the *Librepensador*, Pablo García (49). However, given that Farfán clearly identified herself with Christian values in the publication *La Siempreviva* (Merida 1870–1872), it would have behooved her life-long friends to reflect this in her homage. Suárez Manzanero discusses some aspects of Pablo García’s *Corona Fúnebre* on pp. 56-57, which appears in World Catalogue as *In memoriam: corona fúnebre y apuntes biográficos del licenciado D. Pablo García*. Merida, H. Ayuntamiento de Campeche, 1990, 1896.

in the importance of the promise of youth. It also served as an important commentary on the need to reform the medical field. Pilar Tenorio's untimely demise provided an opportunity for the youth of Merida to offer the sublime gift or offering of consolation to her grieving parents. In Pilar's tribute, we find the published names of the future cultural and political actors in Merida. Farfán's *Corona Fúnebre* included elegiac poems of solidarity and grief by her life-long female friends (among others). Significantly, biographical material about Farfán by a male contributor showcased the history of Yucatan and its regional pride.

Although the *Corona Fúnebre* had its roots in Spain, it acquired a new function and tone in the Spanish Americas that combined elements of biographical information, Romantic expression, Republican aspirations, and sometimes, Christian consolation in an era of increasing secularization. These publications document a tension in the perception of the finality of life and the care of the soul in Mexican society. Ignored by literary critics, this elite tradition sought to transform the ephemeral funeral wreath into a lasting tribute whose printed pages facilitated a resounding attempt at some earthly permanence at the service of national or regional posterity.

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