

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE POETRY AND FICTION OF TITA LACAMBRA-AYALA

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Introduction

Modern literary theories and approaches have thrown into question not only the interpretations of established critics but also the act of interpretation itself. It is conventional to believe that a literary text should be treated as a direct utterance of a writer, that its meaning is determined by certain objective factors, such as the author's intent, and that a stable meaning of that text is possible. These beliefs are shattered when one is faced with the idea that authorial intent may not be the primary source of a literary text's meaning, and that the work is not just a simple reflection of outside reality, a notion that ignores the interventions between the text and life. A radical change in the concept of interpretation happens when one pays attention to the possibility that the literary text can have more than one meaning and may constitute a powerful discourse.

This multiplicity of meanings in a literary work is rooted in the fact that our understanding of it is bound to be mediated by and in language. The words of a literary text are signs that point to a certain reality, the reality of meanings in a literary work. The problem facing the critic then is deciphering this language which may offer meanings that are apparent and meanings that are hidden – what modern critics call the “unconscious” of the work. When one considers that the literary text is conditioned by a society's ideology that intervenes between the author and the text, this makes the literary production a more complex process.

Such is the case with the literary works of Tita Lacambra-Ayala. Her poetry and her short stories are written in a language that encodes split-level meanings and “interlocking perspectives.” Seen as literary works that offer a female perspective of the world, the

texts portraying women are records of a domestic world peopled by women oscillating between submission to the values sanctioned by society and complaint against the same values set by the society. This oscillation can be seen in a discourse that is permeated with silences that speak of other meanings than the ones apparent in the text.

These silences in the texts expose an ideology that includes not only the aesthetic codes pervading the literary works but more importantly the cultural codes that influence the production of these texts. As a product of the cultural ideology of the period, the author's literary texts overtly adhere to this ideology which silences beliefs and convictions that do not precisely conform to prevailing societal conventions.

Recently, some of these literary texts have been included in a few feminist anthologies, which makes one wonder if the texts' representation of women can be considered feminist and if the texts' language is the 'double-voiced' discourse feminists are trumpeting about. To make this conclusion, however, based on just this observation, is to see another type of women, women who are not necessarily feminists but who are, for all their apparent silence and acquiescence, strong and resilient women in their own right.

This article primarily is intended to uncover the way female experiences are portrayed in the poetry and fiction of Tita Lacambra-Ayala. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What images of women can be found in the poetry and fiction of Tita Lacambra-Ayala?
2. What ideology has influenced the production of these works?

In analyzing the poetry and fiction of Tita Lacambra-Ayala, this researcher grounds her study mainly on Pierre Macherey's theory of textual gaps and silences and Roland Barthes' theory of the roles of author and reader in the text. Macherey's theory maintains that literature is a specific and irreducible form of discourse, but that the

language which constitutes the raw material of the text is the "language of ideology and is thus an inadequate language: incomplete, partial, incapable of concealing the real contradictions it is its purpose to efface" (Belsey 1997:661).

This is echoed by Roland Barthes (cited by Webster, 1995) whose theories posit that literary texts are networks of meaning composed of various discourses. This multiplicity of meanings cannot be reduced or distilled into a single, fixed interpretation. The literary text is irreducible and open to repeated readings and reinterpretation. He further argues that we need to overthrow the myth of the author as the originator of meaning for this traditional view is one which obscures and controls the potential meanings in a literary text.

In Barthes' essay, entitled "Death of the Author," he argues that we need to abandon an author-centered approach if we are to realize the full range of meanings contained within a literary text. He explains this by pointing out that "it is language which speaks not the author" (Ibid:18). Writers only have the power to mix and reassemble already existing writings. They "cannot use writing to 'express' themselves, but only to draw upon that immense dictionary of language and culture which is 'always already written,' "to use a favorite Barthean phrase (cited by Selden 1985:52). Thus, the idea of the author becomes one strand, one narrative among many of which a literary text is composed. The reader then allows meaning to be located in the work not in the author's mind.

This shift now opens the text to a variety of interpretations largely based on the reader's perspective. As Barthes would put it: "the multiplicity of meanings which make up a text is focused not on the author but on the reader" (Webster 1995:18). The literary text's meaning lies not on its origin but on its destination, which is the reader. This refocusing undermines the role of the author in the production of the literary text but as Barthes himself argues, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Ibid.).

Barthes' ideas are closely allied to Macherey's contention that a text cannot be fixed on just one interpretation. The reader can see this in the silences and contradictions of the literary text. These contradictions are seen even in realist literary works, which Macherey mainly deals with, because in its attempt to create a coherent and internally consistent fictive world, the text, in spite of itself, exposes incoherencies, omissions, and absences. These contradictions reveal the inability of the language used in the text to create coherence as can be seen in the contradictions between the diverse elements of the literary work, thereby creating an absence at the center of the work.

This absence or lack echoes unspoken meanings in the text, creating a division or split among the meanings in the work. Macherey (cited by Belsey, 1997) compares this 'lack' or silence in the consciousness of the work with the unconscious which Freud explored. This unconscious, however, should not be confused with the unconscious of the author. The gaps, silences, or lack in the text, what it cannot say, correspond to the unconscious of the text not the unconscious of the author of the text .

Echoing Lacan's psychoanalysis (cited by Selden, 1986), which posits that the child's entry into the linguistic stage is also the birth of the unconscious, Macherey says that the unconscious of the work, not the author, is constructed in the moment of entry into literary form. This can be seen in the gaps and silences of the work, which are also the gaps between the ideological project and the literary form. This splitting within the work, this contradiction and collision of divergent meanings, is the work's unconscious. For Macherey:

a text functions at two levels: that of the surface ideology where we are conscious of the natural, obvious relations between events; and a hidden or unconscious level where the flaws of the surface are exposed, where we perceive fractures in the supposed unity of the text. These unconscious moments may be in the form of silences or absences, things which are not allowed to enter into the dominant ideological discourse, or take the form of contradictions and inconsistencies (Webster 1996:72).

This splitting in the text resulting in divergent meanings is due to the text's relation to ideology. As a reality in which we all live, "ideology imposes its silences on literature, which creates a source of tension within the text" (Sim 1995:284). However, the literary work at the same time gives form to that ideology which on the outside tends to appear formless and spontaneous or natural. The process of explanation then becomes twofold. First, it is necessary to analyze the text in an accurate description which respects the specificity of the work, and second, to stand back from it. In Macherey's words: "To know the history from which the text emerges, and about which its ideological content so frequently maintains a tense and uneasy silence."

Because of these factors, Macherey rejects the idea that authorial intention guarantees a single, unified meaning of the work (Sim 1995). The silences and contradictions in the text make the text incomplete pointing to another set of meanings perhaps not consciously intended by the author. The object then of the critic is to seek not the unity of each literary work, that is, the unity among its elements, but the multiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings (Belsey 1997). One should look for the incompleteness, the omissions which it displays but cannot describe, and above all, its contradictions. Macherey's way of reading the text is to deconstruct it, to open the text to release the possible positions of intelligibility in the work and to locate meaning in the space which connects the spoken and the unspoken.

Methodology

As a literary research, the study started with the subject of the critical study. Tita Lacambra-Ayala was chosen as she is one of the few women authors in the Philippine literary scene whose literary works have already been published and yet still remain open to varying interpretations. Considering that our literary anthologies have included very few women authors, a critical study of the literary works of Ayala is timely so we can begin supplying our anthologies with the texts of deserving women authors.

The author's literary texts were collected and because many of them are no longer in print, only three of Ayala's books, two books of poetry and one book of fiction, were included in this study. Five additional literary works, found in different anthologies but not part of her published books, were also included. All the literary texts in these books were read and after establishing the thematic thread which will become the focus of the study, only those texts which contain women characters, or portray domesticity, were included in the final list.

The author's published autobiography was included in the study as a secondary source since it allows us a glimpse of the author's life through a medium that provides conflicting interpretations: language. The transcript of the interview done by Edna Manlapaz and Marjorie Evasco (1996) on the author was also included in the study as another source of data. Both the interview and the author's autobiography offer the reader a glimpse into the ideology that has produced the texts under study.

In the analysis of the literary texts, close reading was done to discover the different levels of meaning in the literary works. The analysis begins with a discussion of the role of domesticity in the lives of the women portrayed there. The study then proceeded to uncover the different images of women found in the texts. Bearing in mind that some of these works have been critically studied before, the researcher based her analysis on Macherey's and Barthes' theories that meaning is not fixed. A new interpretation of how these women were portrayed can be found based on the silences and contradictions found in the various texts.

The images of women were then grouped and the common characteristics found in these women were explored. Focusing on the silences, omissions, and contradictions of words and ideas in the texts, these images were then evaluated for their adherence to traditional and conventional female archetypes found in the literatures of the past. The actual passages where these silences and contradictions were found were quoted in the paper, followed by a discussion of the apparent and submerged meanings in these texts.

These submerged meanings were then juxtaposed with the apparent or manifest meanings of the works.

Finally, the paper investigated the ideology behind these works. A theory on the possible ideology which allowed for this kind of writing was formulated, based on the prevailing ideology of the period that produced the works. Since ideology is a complex spectrum of ideas, the study limited itself to an exploration of the ideology that pertains to female perspectives and experiences. Feminist overtones and undertones were also analyzed to determine the extent of the feminism seen in these literary works. The author's autobiography, an interview with her conducted by Manlapaz and Evasco in 1996, and transcripts from her comments given to this researcher (Lacambra-Ayala 1999) were used as bases for the evaluation.

Images of Women

Not all of the literary texts in the books included in this study present women as their central characters nor do they all talk about the domestic life or women's worlds. Those that do, however, focus on the illustration and portrayal of women's experiences and realities even if the perspective used by the author is not from a woman's point of view.

Sunflower poems, the author's first book of poetry, was published in 1960, five years after her marriage to Jose Ayala. It includes an excellent preface written by Alejandro Hufana, who praised her symbolic poetry. This accolade is humbly negated by Lacambra-Ayala in her autobiography (1998b).

I do get embarrassed reading them again, though, for the roughness of rhythm and the crudity of approach in the emotional context of each work. I find some immature, *with an annoying tone of complaint...* Also they lack subtlety, and have a put-on quality of delicacy that does not seem intrinsic to the situational element.

This “tone of complaint” can be seen in twelve poems which talk of mundane, everyday realities in a woman’s world but whose subtexts manifest a hesitant questioning and a passive rebellion for a person’s lot in life. Other early poems not included in the *Sunflower* collection, namely: “Mostly I was,” “Are you an Arab?” and “The horse poem,” also have underlying tones of bitterness for one’s present lifestyle.

Reading this particular phase in the author’s life, one gets the picture of a writer who is still unsure about her gifts and tries to find fulfillment in other persons’ works. In Ayala’s own words: “All this self-criticism of my work has made me collect, study and later print the works of other people as an attempt to seek the level of poetic sensibility that I feel is missing in my own (1998b:33).” This has led the author to edit and publish *Davao harvest* (1979), an anthology of literary works of Davao writers, and *Road map series*, a folio type of publication which resembles a road map with folds as pages. Every edition of the *Road map series* features the work of an artist from the region, thereby contributing to the increased visibility of regional works and talents.

The uncertainty that the author was going through can partly be traced to Ayala’s ideas that she lacks an adequate philosophical background, a background denied her in her college days.

Symbolic logic is the type of philosophy that Education students were offered. I’ve had to catch up on the rest of philosophy on my own. This touches the heart of things for me. My not having read too much philosophy makes me feel I’ve really missed out on something so big. I feel very ignorant so often (Ibid:33-34).

Her literary works in those days manifested this hesitancy, this feeling of not being able to realize a person’s full potential. In the poem “Dried prunes stuck on bannisters” for example, the speaker meditates:

about lost virtues and ideals
with which incapability is clothed
measuring discrepancies like silk
to hang on windows and disguise
with bright of orchids and junglefound

This questioning attacks the very root of the speaker’s existence. She asks herself if she really ever was fruit “on truly trees or merely dried prunes stuck on bannisters” – whether she truly has the gift. Situating this anxiety in the midst of a domestic scene can be seen in many of the author’s other early poems and even some of her fiction.

The author’s only book of fiction, *Pieces of strings and other stories*, was published in 1984. Most of the stories have the first-person point of view applied with a liberal dose of the author’s symbolism. Ten of these stories center on women’s experiences, though not all have women as the central characters. Incidence of domestic concerns and women’s roles in this paradigm can be seen in the stories.

All of these are not overt portrayals of women’s difficulties though. At most, they are subtle presentations of women who undergo different experiences and discover different priorities in different stages of their lives. In such presentations, the author does not always use a realistic, chronological narration. Some stories are amorphous and surreal which blurs the picture of the woman being conveyed in the stories.

Written during the time when the Feminist Movement is beginning to be taken seriously in the Philippines, the book exhibits the “uneven forms of feminist consciousness” characteristic of the 1970s and the 1980s (Pineda-Ofreneo, 1992). There is a heightened consciousness of a woman’s bitter lot in life where, on one side, she is silent and suffering, and on the other, she is assertive and complaining. The most disturbing, however, of these portrayals of wives and mothers, who are suffering traumatic effects because of domestic demands, is the housewife in the story “Everything”. Included in some feminist anthologies and even reread using feminist

criticism, the story is responsible for the question of whether Tita Lacambra-Ayala is a feminist writer or not.

The author's latest book of poetry, *Camels and shapes of darkness in a time of olives* (1998a), manifests some changes in the author's output, not so much in her writing style but in her choice of subject matter. The poems in the book deal with diverse subjects ranging from women's concerns to social awareness, and religious and philosophical issues. The poems dealing with women's experiences still have underlying tones of bitterness and complaint but along with these is an accompanying ironic tone in the treatment of problems that one experiences in life. Produced during an era, described by some as the age of knowledge explosion, the book is more frank compared to its predecessors in its presentation of a woman's bitter conflicts and unfulfilled desires.

Tita Lacambra-Ayala's world of women is inscribed in domesticity. In the author's early works, three poems describe domestic scenes and their effect on the home's occupants. In the poem, "Home is Where," the home is described as sanctuary. It is a place that protects you and nurtures you and shelters you from harm. In fact, the title itself is taken from a popular adage: "Home is where the heart is." The chopping off of the latter part of the saying is a silencing that speaks out about the other aspects of the home.

There the quick love
owns you wide as mind
drowns as possessive sea
Swirl of lost boats.
There the *illusion*
engulfs like the dream...
There the sanctuary
binds in one like skin...

The contrasting words in the text show us the paradox of the home. It loves you and yet owns you, protects you and yet drowns you, nurtures you and yet binds you. This portrayal of the home offers the reader a truth about that other aspect of the home which has an adverse effect on its members. While one finds love in it, it can also

be a suffocating place that limits one's freedom as one must follow its written and unwritten rules and must conform to the expectations of the other members of the family.

This grim side of the home is the angle being shown by the poem. While many societies idealize the home as a place where one finds love, the poem offers a view of that side of the home that fosters insecurities and traumas. The security offered at home is an "illusion" for it masks the trembling suffocation one feels from too much affection and too much attachment. The love shown you in the home is heartening and yet also confining as it smothers you in its possessive embrace.

Another poem, which offers the bleak side of domestic life is "Mostly I was." Here, the routine of domesticity is portrayed as one that imprisons the wife and mother in its limited horizons. The woman in this poem is lost in her domestic chores which are seen as never ending and the last stanzas portray the effect of this toil on the woman:

But my feet
abandoned me long ago...
the world has turned
into a home
another country is the beach
The neighbor's garden
a son's friends

The exaggeration in the last three lines emphasizes the isolation felt by the speaker where even a neighbor's garden is already a faraway country for her. The tone of the poem stresses the speaker's loneliness touched by a little resentment over the demands that her domestic duties put upon her. Domestic concerns in this poem are pictured as a burden, one that drains all the time and energy of the speaker and confines her within the walls of the home. Implied also in this poem is the idea that household work is not very significant. Even though you have a lot to accomplish, these are trivial compared to the other things you can do outside of the home.

Domestic duties are again some of the causes of the housewife's predicament in "The dragon." This is not readily apparent though at the first reading. This poem strives for a light, even funny portrayal of a domestic scene that can be found in any home. The man offering her an invitation is likened to a dragon, but a friendly, playful dragon:

He sat there curling his tail
Upon the basket chair, smoking
A hookah... and puffed blue smoke
About (he was in a mood)...

The invitation itself is couched in tempting, whimsical images:

If you would consider a stay with me
where there are only gulls for sky
and starfish; yes only starfish upon the
floor (no more dust to sweep, mind you)
would you-would you then go?

The scene is reminiscent of Adam and Eve, only in reverse. The man is tempting her to go to a much more beautiful place than the one she is currently occupying and it is an offer quite fascinating to many women.

Using another angle to look at the poem, we find an undertone of yearning on the part of the woman. She would have liked to go, especially as the invitation offers her a break away from her routine – "no more dust to sweep" – but her obligations are depicted as sacred responsibilities that cannot be abandoned. She almost succumbs to the temptation to leave her duties and go with the man but one thing stops her:

I might have then too. Only
who would mind Baby and spoon
his soup? And who would weed
the flower garden when I am gone?

Small things, small chores, yet they prevent her from allowing herself to accept the invitation. A wistful tone emerges from the playful

tone of the poem in these last lines. There is an undertone of yearning here as the speaker enumerates the domestic chores that prevent her from taking up the man's offer.

The use of the dragon also to refer to the man is to bestow a tone of irony on the text's portrayal of the man who is seen as a monster that disrupts the speaker's duties. There is a resentment that is latent in the text on the part of the speaker. Implied in the poem is an irritation towards the man who offers the speaker so much, even knowing perhaps that she cannot abandon her responsibilities.

Among the author's new batch of poems, "Coffee break" is the poem that focuses on domestic sounds. It is presented from the perspective of the speaker taking a break from her daily routine. She sits for a moment and contemplates the sounds that she can hear in and around the house. The sounds are ordinary, quite common in many households: the sounds of the laundry woman washing the clothes, the cook frying eggs, cats mating in the porch, a vendor selling *kutsinta*, the whirling of the fan.

It presents an innocuous, wholesome, domestic picture but the opening line of the poem serves a discordant note:

without fear we balance
the world's sounds
here in a corner of this
warm room...

The phrase "without fear" opens up another angle with which to view the poem. Apparently, these words would indicate that the speaker, who is with somebody at this time of the day, feels safe in the haven of her own house while listening to the sounds around her. There is a certain security in sitting down and being surrounded by the sounds of the outside world while inside the walls of one's own home. The sounds intrude but only in so far as the occupants of the house can hear them.

The choice of words used in the opening line however implies an unspoken meaning. The phrase "without fear" carries with it an

unspoken object – without fear of what? This lack of fear can refer to one's safety inside one's own house or it can also refer to the lack of fear from anybody or anything that may object to the speaker's taking a break and being idle for a while. The coffee break is a suspension of time where you stop for a moment in whatever you are doing and just let the world turn without you. There is an underlying tone in the opening lines that hint of daring on the part of the one taking the break. The speaker in this instance, stops her domestic routine, relaxes and "without fear," listens to the sounds around her and for a moment travels beyond her own self to absorb the reality of the world around her.

The author's fiction describes in vivid detail these portraits of domestic scenes. In "The bird," the sketch of a woman ironing clothes presents a female perspective only a woman author can portray:

I opened my eyes to see Sisa sitting cross legged on the floor before a low table covered with blankets, a glowing charcoal iron with a red handle to her left, its numerous scalloped eyes smoldering as it moved back-forth back-forth over a garment... A pile of finished ironing was on a mat on her other side and at her elbow a wooden basin almost empty of dampened rolled laundry.

This domestic routine is hypnotic in the way the flat iron goes back and forth on a cloth. The sameness in the chore is soothing in its familiarity.

The contrasting use of realistic and symbolic languages opens up a latent meaning which doubts the security one finds in the home. The narrator's realization at the end of the story, where she struggles against something she cannot understand yet, opens up another view of the home, one that compels you to realize that it cannot totally protect you from the realities of an adult world.

In "Everything," the domestic sounds of people and things dominate the entire story. The story is about a housewife recovering from a nervous breakdown and advised by the doctor to have peace

and quiet. The domestic sounds around the house however, permeate not only the woman's consciousness but also the entire story. From her room, where she imagines herself to be like Gulliver tied to her bedposts, she can still hear the children's and the husband's demands alongside the usual sounds of the house. Like Gulliver, she imagines these sounds running all over her body, keeping her tied to the bed.

The stream-of-consciousness narration emphasizes the impinging on the woman's consciousness of the activities of the husband, children, and maid in the house. Apparently, the familiarity of these daily sounds in the house is contributory to her recovery:

EVERYTHING, and the daily sounds of this daily life recur like the familiar passages of Tchaichovsky... and I in my bed, turning over like a pancake when the bubbles appear, I given the privilege of not participating in this ghostly, ghostly troublesome world...

The paradoxical words however in the preceding passage open up a new angle with which to view the story. The domestic chatter is familiar, just like music and yet she is in her bed thankful that she does not have to participate in all of that. But, with her period of recovery almost over, it is inevitable that she will participate again in this "ghostly, ghostly world" that she tried to run away from.

The harsh sounds engulf and drown her, and force her to face the fact that after her suicide attempt, nothing much has changed in their household. These sounds reflect duties and responsibilities, which she has no choice but to go back to, thereby accepting with resignation the demands of "everything" that caused her to attempt to commit suicide in the first place.

The woman as a literary character has been subjected to various interpretations by many writers and some of these interpretations are an affront to the Filipino woman's dignity and womanhood. Lilia Quindoza Santiago's essay, "The Filipina as a metaphor for crisis," declares that: "In many, if not most of these interpretations, she is portrayed as a rather weak character, lacking in disposition and social conscience, oftentimes a wretch who is

uncreative and unproductive” (Kintanar 1992:118). There are a few writers however, who give alternative representations of women that quite contradict the roles and images that the dominant ideology has forced upon them. The women in Tita Lacambra-Ayala’s poetry and fiction are women, who apparently conform to the popular notions of what a woman should be. Underneath these conforming portrayals are alternative pictures of women who have a consciousness of their miserable lot and who are trying to question society’s paradigm of womanhood. These divergent images give us conflicting pictures of women who are very much a part of the dominant ideology while also giving us an image of that kind of women questioning this ideology.

The Mother

The mother in Tita Ayala’s world of women is a female absorbed in her children’s lives. She is forged in the image of the Virgin Mother who will grieve for her children and will sacrifice her life for them. Contemporary definitions and perceptions of motherhood as noble and imbued with gentle heroism are readily apparent in the portrayal of these women. In “Lost: One rebel,” she is pictured as the only person left to embrace her son with love after the outside world rejects him.

forgotten in a day a mere
life lost and who is left
to care

But the drying womb
that breasted first of all
its pain while prompting joy...
who could care more

The last lines of the poem recall to mind the *Pietà* of Michelangelo. A mother’s grief cannot be fully fathomed. We can perhaps sympathize with it but we can never really and fully comprehend her loss.

The last line reflects the popular belief that it is natural for a mother to care for her child and even *expected* of her to do so. A mother will grieve for the lost son whom everybody else may forget and reject. She will stay with him even until death and will be the one left to convey him to his grave. This line is especially significant as it reinforces the popular notion that a mother’s job is to love her children no matter what. Her love is the only thing that a child can count on until the end of his life.

This self-sacrificing mother is again seen in “Pieces of Strings.” In this story, the mother focuses her whole life on her son and when he later rejects her, the mother loses her reason for living. The pieces of strings, which literally refer to the threads she uses for crocheting, are indicative of the mother’s longings. She suffers silently and no scathing condemnations or recriminations can be heard from her. She simply loses interest in living and puts aside crocheting, her main interest and her livelihood.

She is pictured as the kind of woman who needs affirmation of her usefulness. When the son informs her that she cannot come to America to live with them, the pieces of her life become knotted and she feels useless and unneeded. Towards the end of the story, when her grandnephew expresses his desire to go to school despite their financial difficulty, she volunteers to support him through agricultural school through her crocheting. When her usefulness is affirmed by Francis, the grandnephew, she picks up the pieces of her life and goes on living, happy in the knowledge that she is needed and appreciated.

How is grandmother? He asks in his letters. *Take good care of her* (a moment before attentive, she now bows her head closer to her crochet work), *and do not allow her to work too much* (she does not seem to listen, her fingers move faster, the metal hook flashes light all over the room). *Tell her I am grateful to her* (she stops, tugs at a kink in the string), *that I always think of her*. (The kink gone, her fingers move again fashioning the little flowers, pyramids, steps and cartwheels – patiently, piece by piece.)

domesticity in the kitchen. The last sentence in the quoted passage above is very telling for the mother here buries her personal feelings in household chores which allow her no room to think.

This identification with her children is also the preoccupation of the mother portrayed in "The exhibit." The story depicts the life of a childless woman, Ola, who befriends an artist to fill an empty space in her life. She feels incomplete without a child of her own. Her name, Mrs. Breed, is an ironic pun to emphasize this barrenness. Apparent in the story is the presence of children in a woman's life as necessary to a woman's fulfillment. The end of the story is an explicit confirmation of this idea as Manita, the artist, produces two daughters of her own after a long absence from Ola's life.

Another look at the conflict of the story would yield for us two voices of women in the text. One is the voice of Ola, the voice of the dominant ideology who conforms to the prevailing notion that a wife must have children in order to be complete. The other voice is Manita, the discordant voice, who challenges this ideal by openly being disdainful of any form of domesticity and even regarding marriage as a cage. These contradictory voices reflect a dilemma in our society today that many women, especially educated career women, have to follow their personal inclinations, even if they are against the prevailing ideology, or succumb to the expectations of this ideology.

Ostensibly, the mothers portrayed in these texts are conventional mothers who still cling to the popular notion of motherhood as a selfless and virtuous state. They are all women of virtue but unspoken in these texts is the women's silent questioning of society's expectations of them as mothers. They adhere to the norms of society, yes, but at the same time, the texts allow for the possibility that women may deviate from these traditional roles. The mother for example in "Pieces of strings" has shut off her son from her existence and transferred her love to her grandnephew. "The exhibit" proposes an alternative lifestyle for a woman quite different from the one adhered to by many women. Although this deviant gets pregnant and

produces two daughters at the end of the story, still she has striven to follow a different path from the one society offers and for a time was able to follow her own inclinations.

The Wife

The wife in Ayala's world is a silent woman, secretly bitter, even resentful of another person, perhaps her husband, but who cannot openly articulate this resentment and disillusionment. She is silent in her aspirations and can only yearn for a better life for both of them. This can be seen in "Rubaiyat's sacrament," where the wife finds difficulty in communicating with the husband. Their relationship has become stilted, with their children becoming a common ground:

You and I have
yet to settle what disguise to wear
meeting each other over coffee
or the children's report cards

As they continue with the impasse, they lose the time and opportunity everyday to restore the relationship, losing themselves in meaningless and restrained conversation that do not really express how they feel. The reference to Rubaiyat echoes the philosophy of life expressed by a famous poem of Omar Khayyam. Life is short and uncertain so we have to live life fully now, for time that is lost cannot be recaptured. The speaker of the poem mourns this loss as she feels the passing of time each day they cannot connect.

Unspoken in these lines is the reason why they cannot communicate and what prevents them from having a more meaningful conversation. The wariness on the part of the wife to initiate the dialogue is an indication of the woman's hesitation to open herself up to possible conflict. Confronting openly the husband is a risk that few women in our society would be willing to take.

This wariness to communicate is also the subject of two of the author's later poems: "Letter in lieu of a poem" and "Tone poem." The former portrays a speaker who observes the apathy and

indifference of the other. She says, "I shaved my head/ But then what's it to you" to this person who has forgotten laughter and remains apathetic to the concerns of the woman. Even such an outrageous act as shaving the head is unnoticed, and the speaker gently mocks the other for this reaction.

Underlying this is the real distress of the woman for somebody who has lost his enthusiasm for life:

Even mirrors are not
to remember how it was
your laughter on the other side
Shook some walls down
A door

The speaker makes efforts to shake the condition that the person finds himself in but, aside from shaving her head, there is no other mention of what the woman does to get the attention of this person. The adages she has embroidered in samplers are "hesitant and reserved." They dry in the sun and become forgotten. The possibility of an open communication is lost as days pass and meaningful moments are forgotten.

In "Tone poem," the speaker is also incapable of breaking the silence between herself and the other person. Clearing the air between them becomes difficult, however, due to the indifference of the other who consciously distances himself and pretends to be blind to the presence of the woman.

you must look at me
sometime
when you are tired
pretending to be blind
then we might break the
silence
and hear each other's
voices

The first lines emphasize the need for clearing the air and the advantage of open communication. The speaker tries to connect with the other but is unsuccessful:

i see you under me
trying not to see
i fly with my eyes
i see you under me
trying not to see...

There is an underlying tone of hope in the poem as the speaker tries to reach out to the other. Implied also is the feeling of hurt of the speaker towards this somebody who continues to evade her efforts to cement the relationship. Also, like in the above poem, the identity of the person that the speaker is referring to is ambiguous. This omission emphasizes the feeling of estrangement or emotional distance experienced by the speaker to this person that she cannot even openly talk about.

In "The dragon," the woman is portrayed as a dedicated housewife who cannot abandon her work in the house. She is tempted to forsake her duties and go gallivanting with a man, depicted as a dragon who thinks only of enjoyment, trying to lure her away from her domestic duties. The speaker describes this dragon in a playful manner and also turns down the invitation in a facetious manner.

Underneath the fanciful images offered by the text, there is also the wife's latent feeling of quiet desperation and yearning for a different lifestyle than the one she is living at the moment. The half-humorous, half-desperate tone of the last lines of the poem:

who would mind Baby and spoon
his soup? And who would weed
the flower garden when I am gone?

echoes the ambivalent feelings of a housewife torn between the desire to escape and the need to stay.

The offer is attractive enough to a woman who is tied to household demands. The reasons why she cannot go prevent her from escaping. Underlying the playful tone in the poem is the wistfulness that hides her feeling of bitterness towards the man who offers her a view quite different from the one she is currently living.

Also underlying the tone in this poem is the image of the dragon which the poem portrays. The allusion to the dragon, which is used in literary works, especially western ones, to represent a malevolent creature causing havoc among the people, speaks of the speaker's reaction to the one offering the invitation. If the dragon represents a man, then we have an image here of a monster, an unfeeling tyrant, who tempts the housewife to forsake her duties. Seen as such, the poem becomes a satire of manhood where the man is pictured as indolent, selfish, and pleasure-seeking.

The dragon is in an easy chair and the contrast between the relaxed, comfortable pose of the man and the harassed, work-laden housewife stresses the difference between their perspectives. The man wants to get away from the pressures of the house, but the woman is too loyal and too used to her own paradigm to think of putting her own comfort first. She thinks about it of course, and is even tempted to do it – perhaps adding to her feeling of resentment – but remains shackled to her own anxieties.

Among the author's short stories, the married woman in "Girl" also lives within the choking confines of the home. There are three kinds of women in this story: the child, the adolescent, and the married woman. The 'silences' in the text reveal to us a wife who is not happy about her present life. Unlike the girl and the adolescent, she does not have a name, and this omission points to the loss of identity of this woman emphasized by the first two episodes of the girl and the adolescent who both have names.

Where the girl and the adolescent are only concerned about their needs and safety, the wife has lost her individuality and her attention is now focused on domestic concerns. The demands of marriage and motherhood force her to face the harsh reality of a

demanding husband and a year-old son. The last line of the story, "She'd have to get some sleep before the baby woke up," is a bland description of the current life of the woman. The understatement forwards the idea that she accepts the demands of her new status as a wife and mother, but latent in this acceptance is her bitter resignation to the havoc these new demands are making on her life. Although secretly resentful, she makes the best of her situation because there is no other choice open to her.

The story "Everything" portrays a most disturbing picture of a wife who attempts suicide but recovers at the end of the story, thanks to her husband and children. The story is told from a first-person point of view and seems to be the confession of a wife who took rat poison in her coffee. There are many silences, exclusions, and contradictions in the text, however, that mar this confessional mode.

Unspoken is the cause of the suicide attempt. We can infer from the title and close textual reading that it is...Everything. Apparently this "everything" is the household travails of the wife. A second look at the contrasting words, however, would tell the reader that the word "everything" is more encompassing. The father, whose limited voice in the story is drowned by the chatter of the children, and who is specifically referred to before the story ends, is part of this "everything" that propelled the woman to attempt suicide.

The root cause of the crisis is silenced by the text which even ends on a happy note. This "happy" ending, though, is negated by contradictory words in the last paragraph.

...and in all things great big *summer* world of disenchantments and growing up... I am most glad to be alive, to wait the afternoon through and eat my meals if only grudgingly, *suffer* the coming of nightfall and view through the kaleidoscope of domesticity the face of Nick, lover-child-father of my children, husband, pillar and foundation, circus strongman, eternal *enemy* and beloved, and promise never again to take rat poison in my cup of coffee when I get tired of everything, everything, everything...

The final revelation that she took rat poison somehow negates the feeling of well-being that the text is trying to convey in the story. The feeling that the reader is left with is that of desperation. The contradictory words reveal unresolved conflicts that caused her to try to commit suicide in the first place.

The opening scenes of the story see the wife awakening to another morning in her life. The morning motif becomes ironic however with the metaphor used in the story. The housewife compares herself to Gulliver being tied to the posts of her own bed. The noise of the children and their father and the general sounds in the house drown the housewife recovering in her room. These sounds dominate the entire story and little space is accorded to the thoughts of the wife.

There's no hot water for coffee.
Is there at all coffee?
"Who forgot to buy milk?
Get me a carton of Tide.
No bath soap!
Who's using the water?
Mummy, my *chinelas* got broken...
Remind me to call the barber...
Stupid cook!
Stupid everybody.
Stop quarrelling or I cut off your allowances!

This "stream-of-consciousness" style of narrating underscores the effect of these household noises, which unavoidably enter the wife's consciousness and interfere with her peace and quiet. They are an endless stream of demands that the wife has to endure and that are made more disheartening by the doctor's "expert" advice, which forbids her to do and think of heavy things, such as reading and even listening to the radio.

The demands of the children arriving at the end of the day swarm around her after the quiet of their absence.

"Mummy, I got your slippers...
Mummy, Bikini spilled coke on my pants...
Mummy, Dinky has a wound on his foot...
Mummy, I want *dede*...
Mummy, I want also new shoes.
Mummy, mummy, mummy. And no one will tell me who tore pages away from Daddy's book or who lost away the needle from the arm of the turntable or who disconnected the refrigerator or put it on defrost when it did not need defrosting... and other such deviltries unknown to womenkind before families were invented. *It is nice to be a mummy.*

To all the demands and concerns engulfing the wife, that last line is all she can say. It is a contradictory statement, bittersweet in its tone and expressing the mix of fondness and exasperation she has for her kids. The understatement is also a rationalization of her job as a mother who is often harassed by her children.

Apparently, the housewife recovers at the end but, submerged in the language of the text is the sad plight of women who cannot openly express their innermost desires and wishes. The contradictory references to the husband imply that he is one of the sources of her inner conflict and yet she feels compelled to describe him as "beloved," "pillar and foundation," and "circus strongman." The Gulliver metaphor at the opening of the story holds true until the end as she still is straining against her ties and her anxieties. This straining however is not overt. She cannot fully express her defiance against whatever is tying her to the bedpost and caused her suicide attempt. The story even ends on a happy note where the wife is engulfed again in her old life and her old paradigm. Society's conventions prevail and she can only accept with inevitable resignation what fate and society have doled out to her.

The same sad plight is experienced by the housewife in "Mostly I was." The woman drowns in the confines of her own home and becomes isolated from the outside world. Although she has too many household chores to do, so many that she has no time for herself, the irony evident in the text is that nothing much happens in her life. Her horizons are limited and a visitor is an alien from another planet

and “history happens when a glass breaks” as it disrupts the even tenor of her existence. She is surrounded by the ‘kaleidoscope of domesticity’ and feels buried in it.

Underlying the ‘kaleidoscope of domesticity’ is discontent with her own lot and a resentment towards what is mostly woman’s work. She has so many things to do yet even the breaking of a glass is a historical happening. Household chores make the wife numb and unconscious of the outside world, and the text exaggerates this isolation from outside reality. Beneath the tone of complaint in the entire poem is the desperation felt by a housewife imprisoned by her own domesticity.

The Young Girl

The young females in Ayala’s world are pictured as simple, innocent beings whose uncomplicated priorities make them safe in the joyous world of innocence and light. In the story “Girl,” she has two faces: the girl and the adolescent. The other female voice in the story, the married woman, is a far cry from the young females. The five-year-old Betty is only concerned with candy and play. The punishment she gets for a misdemeanor is quickly forgotten and is just a minor splash in her young life. It is a playful foray into a forbidden world, one she ventures into without guilt and hesitation. She is even the one who confesses her misbehavior, a manifestation of the security she feels where even a wrong done does not rock her world. She is absorbed only with her own wants and needs, and if there is a reality outside of her own reality, she is unaware and unconcerned about it.

The sixteen-year-old Bessie is to some extent also like this. Her preoccupation is her love life, but the hints of her boyfriend about a storm are ignored. She is engrossed with her own ideas and dreams, and outside unpleasantness does not bother her very much for she is inside her own world where she is protected and safe. Unlike Betty, she has a certain awareness of the outside world but chooses to ignore it.

She went to bed at eight that night... Tonight she liked her mosquito net. It had no holes in it. She felt very safe and defended in it. What was in was in, what was out was out and she was very safe where she was, in.

The fact that the boyfriend does not have a name serves to underscore this. Bessie’s dreams are more important to her than the unnamed boy whose own concerns are only secondary to her own. She has an impending sense of doom; “When she finally fell asleep she dreamed that there was a storm” but she is able to ignore it. These two females are contrasted with the third woman in the story who cannot retreat from and ignore the ‘storms’ in her present life. In fact, the dream is a foreshadowing of the difficulties that the married woman is confronted with in her adult world.

Underneath the happy, unconcerned attitude of the young girl is a feeling of fear and insecurity against the threat of a “storm,” the harsh realities of an adult world. Although she is absorbed in her own dreams, on the fringes of this absorption is an awareness that she cannot be safe at home for much longer.

In “Poem for Veronica grown older,” Veronica is portrayed as a girl who has outgrown the simple joys of young life. She now embraces the artificial beauty of beauty parlors and has left behind the unaffected gracelessness of the past. She has left behind simple joys where laughter is embraced and loneliness ignored, and now she embraces the fashion dictated by society. She has grown far away from the speaker who looks back at their happy times together.

There is a latent tone in the poem that forwards the idea that growing up is not always positive but is negative too because the growth emphasizes the generation gap between the young girl and the older woman who is the speaker in the poem. The girl does not look back but instead rushes on to embrace new things in her life. The older woman, however, is left with memories of what they shared before and is disturbed by the separation.

...What has become of all the grace
 we shared in bare feet, hair unset and de-banged...
 Summers were your specialty
 the major season of your dreams lit up
 like flowers every smile you saw and every sadness
 was heartbreak you could never bear... How old, how
 cold
 Veronica, can even the closest of friends grow?

The gentle accusation of the last line reveals a forlorn tone that stresses the different perspectives and the different experiences that both young and older females face.

Growth as an encounter in darkness and complication is also the subject matter of the story "The bird." The narrator of the story is a young girl awakening to her own sensuality and being influenced by an older woman. This initiation into a knowledge of a woman's sexuality is colored by the fantasies of Sisa, the older woman. The allusion to Sisa, a popular literary character in Philippine literature who is depicted in Rizal's novel as a crazy woman, helps underscore the feeling of confusion that the girl feels, especially over Sisa's explanations and instructions about the bird.

The bird in the story symbolizes a being that Sisa has waited for. She lectures the young girl to wait patiently for the bird and if the young girl will just be patient in her waiting, the bird will eventually come to nest on her head. The girl sometimes gets tired of waiting but does not forget about the bird.

Sometimes as I dove into the water then turned to float on my back I imagined the shadow of a wide winged white bird following me...The shadow of the bird would be a cool cloud over my body. At times in my sleep I would feel the clasp of its claws on my hip, its weight pressing me closer to the mat, its tail fanning my backside...

The symbolic language makes the sexual innuendoes in the story tame and inoffensive. The girl is curious about this aspect of womanhood and cannot wait to experience it.

...my heart would yearn for *it* painfully in my dreams...Somehow waiting for the bird in the dark, in the night, was a more intense waiting than sitting up still by the window in the afternoon hours. The mysteries of the dark made *him* more changeable and fascinating...*His* reality extended from the sounds and shadows of the hours into the immeasurable ravines of sleep.

The shift of pronouns from *IT* to *HIM* signifies that the girl is aware that what she is waiting for is not really a literal bird but a man. In some circles, "bird" would definitely refer to a man, most specifically, that part of the man that differentiates him from a woman. The longings that she is feeling are the longings of a budding woman who does not understand yet what these longings lead to. The semi-allegorical narration heightens these secret desires that the girl cannot name yet.

Moreover, the silences in the text make the secrets of womanhood so exotic and mysterious. The end of the story indicates that the girl has sensed the arrival of the awaited man even though she cannot see him. The sight of Sisa naked and surrounded by a nest of blankets and clothes stupefy the young girl and she retreats into the safe world of girlhood.

I closed the door as quietly as I could, pulling it into place onto the doorframe, picked up the bolo, tiptoed through the kitchen and down the stairs towards the rice shed to call mother.

The symbolic way in which the narrator's encounter with the adult world of sexuality is presented clouds the issue too much indicating a need to discuss in a delicate manner a subject which is taboo for many people.

Problems encountered in growing up can also be seen in "Mildew." In the story, Maura is the picture of a girl who is confronted with the impractical ambitions of the father, a man incapable of separating himself from what he had the power to do. He tries to achieve his ambitions through his children and Maura is dismayed by this. She does not forcefully confront her father about his delusions

and is sad over the transformation that occurred in the family mainly due to the father's ambitions. This transformation in the family is symbolized by the smell of mildew that does not seem to leave the house.

The restrained narration of the story underscores Maura's reaction to the situation. Her ambivalent feelings toward the father stem from the father's exaggerated reaction to Maura's poem being published in a magazine. He overreacts to what Maura considers as a small achievement which starts him on a road of grand ambitions. She reluctantly swallows her protest at her father's vanity but nurtures a wish that the father would meet a working man whose lunch is wrapped in the page of the magazine her father is so proud of.

This dissatisfaction towards the father is understated and smoothed over. The story ends with Maura busying herself with the curtain that she hangs to beautify their home.

The cloth was still clean and dry... The curtain would soon wilt when the starch absorbed enough dampness from the air, and then the smell would come again, like a pursuing reminder... She let the flowers fall broadly at her feet, remembering that tomorrow she would have to go to school.

The innocuous ending masks her irritation and desperation over what is happening in their family. From a normal family life, theirs has become unsettled where the father works all day and into the night just to achieve his dreams. The mildew in the apartment becomes symbolic of the rot that has entered their lives.

In the poem "Flowers of youth," young people, not just girls, are described as beautiful but transient beings who bloom for a while and are gone.

Things decay, strength is
forgotten in the face of weakness...
Soon your face will be a small
photograph almost like a stamp
on a very important letter
that I mailed to someone very far away

The poem speaks of a truth that all human beings go through, that the time spent in this world is over too soon. This is especially poignant for young people. Their hopes, ideals and bright dreams decay and soon they exit the world of childhood and enter the ugly realities of adulthood.

The Waiting and Accepting Woman

The woman who waits and accepts her fate is another image of the woman seen in Ayala's poetry and fiction. In an early poem, "Old the mermaid grows," the speaker is portrayed as a woman patiently waiting for whatever fate provides her. She accepts the gifts of the sea and does not question the small catch or the unfairness of poverty. She is strong and unmoved by the storms in her life and can only accept whatever bounty the sea has to offer.

In looking at the contradictory words however of the text, one sees another view of this accepting woman.

She is a special tribe lulled by tides to *cold*
patience neither shadowless nor shadowed
tinted nor undone by storm...
if poor, what is she to question gift of silent waters?

The words "cold patience" used to refer to the woman, would suggest two contrasting traits of this woman. She is patient, yes, but it is a cold patience – a passionless and unemotional acceptance of the fate dealt her. This cold patience borders on numbness, actually, a cold resignation to what she cannot change. Her acceptance is a resigned acceptance, forced on her by the cruelty of fate and she has no choice but to bear it. She does not let this upset her for who is she to question the fates? The self-mocking tone in this statement contradicts her seeming acceptance of the small catch. Still, her protests are silent ones, unspoken against the harshness of the reality of her life. The waters are "silent waters," blind and indifferent to the woman's suffering.

Another disturbing picture of the pain that waiting brings is portrayed in the poem, "Game." The speaker patiently waits for the other person, a loved one who does not fulfill her expectations. She offers up her heart and waits to be noticed but the other person either ignores her or cannot respond. The words

myself lost outside the door
counting how often it swings open and closes
like wounds in the walls and in your dreams
stupidly waiting

are like a tableau painfully depicting someone who comes and goes, with the woman standing by the door, waiting. Implied in the lines of the poem is the woman's impatience for the game to begin again. She coerces the other person to get up and move: "from your *sleep* depart from your *corpse* depart," words that indicate the speaker's irritation with that person's inability to function fully. Whether this indifference is conscious or not, the effect on the woman is devastating. She despises herself for "stupidly waiting" but cannot seem to do anything about the situation except wait. The poem is filled with tones of patience and impatience felt by a woman for someone she cares about who cannot for the moment play the game with her.

Another aspect of accepting is portrayed by newer poems like "The true condition of man." In this poem, the speaker realizes that the right way to survive in this world is to accept docilely what is and not to think about what ought to be. Life is a journey through an inhospitable road, and questioning this harsh and cruel road is futile. Like a camel, man should just float through the desert, just planning for basic necessities like water to see him through his journey beneath the burning sun and under the indifferent eyes of whatever gods there may be.

...one must
feel absolutely self-sufficient to contain
endless ruminations of the clock
the burning of the sun
the indifference of stars in their
impossible grandeur and permanence

Through all these, the only way to survive the journey of life is to just float, to accept unquestioningly whatever one sees. The last lines of the poem are an allusion to an earlier work of the author entitled "Are you an Arab?" which questions the speaker's search for authenticity and whether she has the right blanket for her search. The new poem ends on a happier note.

you are like an Arab, says my son
who thinks at this point that for all
the journeys that i must make i have finally found
the right blanket.

The blanket, which literally refers to a magic carpet that would take you places, would also indicate on a symbolic level a different kind of journey – the kind of journey taken by the soul. When the son says that she has finally found the right kind of blanket, it could mean she is more confident of herself, more sure of where she is going and how to get there.

The camel's ability to survive is also the subject of "The camel is a wise animal." The persona in the poem realizes the futility of contemplation for it is a waste of time deciding what is true or not. A truth, which you are sure of, may be a falsehood seen in another light. We wear ourselves ragged in our thinking, which takes a long time, as consciousness passes through a slow, tricky route.

but with all the frazzling of nerves and worry
and dementia and discontent one should
realize it is a waste of time deciding what
is true or not...

We suffer stress and nervous breakdowns in our worrying, unlike the camel, which just floats through the desert, unconcerned about the things around him. Implied in this poem is the speaker's admiration for this way of confronting life and perhaps a wish to emulate this way of looking at life.

This motif of not thinking and just accepting can again be seen in two new poems: "The beachcomber's hut" and "The doctor

said.” The persona in the first poem concludes that the dog is better off compared to a man, who is vocal about his woes and his opinions:

One befriends the dog
because it cannot think
but licks the gaping wound
savoring the flavor...

The contrast between the dog and the man, who thinks too much and sometimes speaks of senseless things, and the other not thinking at all, again emphasizes the speaker’s idea that not to think is a better way of living one’s life.

In “The doctor said,” the woman finds a cure for her problems – that of stopping to think hard thoughts and to be accepting of the stupidities around her and the lack of principles in people.

It would harm my brain
to complain so much
about the stupidities
that cling around me like pollution...
who cares about them anyway?
I shouldn’t.

The words “I shouldn’t” indicate her realization that it would be fruitless for her to mind so much about the transgressions and pretenses of other people. If she does otherwise, then the bump on her head caused by thinking too much will eventually diminish and fade away.

The Artist

Another image of a woman found in the texts is that of the artist. She is a woman with creative energy to express herself. In the story, “The exhibit,” Manita is a painter who befriends Ola, a childless woman. As an artist. Manita is described here as erratic and negative, even referred to by Ola’s husband as “dirty.” Her freedom loving spirit is showcased at the beginning of the story in her disdain for the

burden of marriage and domestic life. When Ola invites her to stay in her house, she demurs.

Look at it my way, she explained, putting back her shoes on her feet, Staying here would be like marriage. I’d be married to time, to space, to objects. It would be like having to accept a square when it’s a circle I need and want. It would be – she stood up and stretched her hands up to the ceiling – martyrdom. I’ve no patience for that, nor discipline. I’d probably just shrivel and die...

The narrator’s discovery at the end of the story that Manita has two daughters comes as a revelation. For all of her talk of independence and scorn for marriage and all it entails, she has the same desire as Ola, to have children of her own. There are, however, hints in the story that prepare us for this. The erratic visits of the painter to Ola’s house are welcomed by the latter. In these visits, “Ola encouraged her to talk about her work, sensing in her friend a need to be reassured of her protestations of independence and self-sufficiency.” The visits also reveal to the reader an inconsistency on the part of the artist who scorns marriage and yet hovers over Ola’s house and life.

The contradictory perspectives shown by Manita in this story are reflective of the contradiction faced by many women today: the advantages of married life and fulfillment in a career. The artist in the story succumbs to the dominant ideology at the end of the story, though giving the reader a picture of an artist who does not find her art to be the be-all and the end-all of her existence. Although she still continues her art, she is able to produce what the narrator can only dream about – children. Whether she is happy with her decision is a gap left by the text, ending it with a domestic picture. But this perspective of an alternative lifestyle for women is forwarded by the text, as it ends with this picture: a woman with children, without a man by her side.

Another artist in Tita Ayala’s work is the woman in “Portrait of Reina.” Ostensibly, the poem is a portrait of a woman who is a hard worker, harvesting the ripe grain. She is unmindful of the burning

heat of the sun and discomfort she is feeling, concentrating hard on her work.

Gauguin woman shorn
bald as the sun
heat blooming from her
icy mind...
Slow and sure her eyes
rise to cut
the ripe grain

Seen as such, the poem is a portrayal of a woman, worker who labors in the heat of the sun. Her icy mind enables her to concentrate on the task. An icy mind connotes coldness and objectivity, traits that allow her to continue with her work and perhaps accept its harsh reality. The heat inside her icy mind would also indicate inner thoughts that are waiting to be expressed, thoughts that contrast with that cold objectivity she has about her situation.

Another look at the poem may yield another interpretation however. In the author's comments on the draft of this study (Lacambra-Ayala 1999), she says that "Gauguin woman is a painter." Seen as such, we see there an artist whose creative energy radiates from the inside. The contradictory, surreal image (bald woman under the heat of the sun) also gives us a picture of an artist who absorbs the images around her. Her creative energy is the heat blooming in her mind, which is transferred to the canvas objectively.

Again, the contrast between the two descriptions opens up a gap in the text. Heat indicates passion and energy when still inside the woman's mind. When transferred outside herself and when expressed, it becomes cold and dispassionate. Here is an artist who is objective and calculating about her work. The passion and energy of her inner thoughts are manifested through a careful, objective manipulation hoping to record faithfully the original germ of that thought. The burning thoughts inside her head are waiting to be born but when they are manifested outside, it is with a cold objectivity that perhaps does not match the intensity of the original idea.

In "A monsoon of friends," we have another picture of an artist who has a lot of friends who are artists, too. The speaker in the poem has ambivalent feelings towards these people:

their acquired and pretended drunkenness to the world
of which they also pretend to be discontented
actually they haven't any choice what other world
could they possibly live in this ragged band of
gypsies who clap their hands mightily when one of them
finishes writing a poem or writing a song...

Their amused commiseration in the lines speaks not only of what the speaker feels but the condition of the other artists as well.

They are seen as mired in their disconsolateness and cannot escape from it however much they party and find a moment of grace in the world. They talk about immunity from human affairs but cannot help but exist in it.

they couldn't be anywhere else they belong
so thoroughly to the disconsolateness
they try to dispossess but which engulfs them so that
they drown they drown they drown

This poem describes the artist as an alienated soul trapped in his or her own view of the world. The word "pretend," used twice by the speaker, opens another dimension in the nature of these artists. Their discontentment and disillusionment are only pretenses, to conceal their despondency about their lives.

The Questioning Woman

The questioning woman in Ayala's poetry and fiction voices complaints about things around her and longs to escape the condition she finds herself in. In "Complaint," she airs her vexation and disillusionment against people and circumstances that do not allow her to fully express herself.

Since I must see no evil
 nor hear no evil
 nor speak speech
 that borders on the gutters
 or accusations be they true and ill...

These restrictions bind people until they really become blind, deaf, and dumb to things around them. A human being's full growth as a person is rooted in a wide range of experiences. How can one achieve full development if one only experiences one side of life? This is a question posed by the poem.

The allusion to the wise monkeys of the east that see and hear and speak no evil emphasizes the impassive and often limited stance taken by some people about the events and circumstances surrounding them. It is indeed an irony to be called wise and yet be unseeing about *everything* that is going on around us. This is seen in the challenge issued in the last lines: "Answer me o holy three/ noble monkeys of the east!" It questions the knowledge of the monkeys, who are regarded as wise, and yet do not see, hear and speak of the other side of life but limit themselves to one aspect of living.

Another form of questioning is posed by the poem, "When Grandmother opens her purse." The grandmother in this poem is conscious of the value of money, and gives coins to her grandchildren instead of paper money which she regards as merely treaties signed by important men. The speaker then rationalizes the coin received from the grandmother by saying that it still can buy things. Hoarded until it becomes a big amount, it can buy a lot of things, even dangerous things like bullets. The questions put forth by the speaker about the church dominates the middle part of the poem. The reference to Christ as

that number one superstar martyr enough who thought
 that dying on the cross was the best spectacle
 to demean oneself and stop all others from
 doing bad things to their fellowmen
 it didn't work, did it...

indicates an aversion towards people who use money to salve their conscience. The poem ends with the speaker's appreciation for the practicality of the grandmother who does not believe in giving paper money to children. Coins are more valuable since metal is harder and more durable than paper and is therefore a better choice.

In "Stella, buy a star," two women are portrayed in the poem: the persona who questions the 'darkness' of a woman's life and Stella, who lacks certain material things in her miserable life. The persona urges Stella to buy a star to light up her life. The lighting up is needed in order to make not just her kitchen brighter but their lives in general. Stella in the first stanza is enduring her *dilis*, *camatis*, and *bagoong* for dinner. In the next stanza, the persona urges her to buy a new battery for her car and most importantly a more solvent owner-driver. The third stanza refers to the physical appearance of Stella who camouflages the lines on her face with makeup and the speaker says this is useless for poverty has etched its mark on her face and no makeup can hide her haggard appearance anymore. The last stanza refers to a literal light with which to brighten her home to replace the candle. Stella in this stanza is a more specific person, a tribal woman who suffers poverty as she does not have any light at all but only a peso candle and a cooking fire.

The persona's sympathy and amused anger for Stella's plight shows her discontent for the way she is struggling with her life, for her helplessness in bettering her own lot. The underlying tone of concern and distress over Stella's plight indicates the speaker's challenge to stop being contented with her lot and to start accomplishing something more to make her life better.

Among Ayala's women, the one who shows active defiance is the housewife in "The last twilight of honorable father-in-law." In this story, the woman's father-in-law dies and she buries him secretly without the knowledge and presence of the other members of the family. The story is humorous in its choice of words and description of the burial.

Well, I never confessed to the crime but I absolve myself of it now in private by offering this *ultimate sacrifice* – using it to wrap Father-in-Law following his *blissful* death. Under its tight folds his head looks like a turnip with the greens just starting to dry, his feet like ginger. Hence, I must hurry him to his tuberous grave.

The crime that the woman refers to is her purchase of the blanket, done secretly against the express entreaties of the husband about her compulsive spending.

Underlying this humor are omissions that are seen after another look at the story. Unspoken is the cause of the death of the father-in-law. We are just told that it is a blissful death. Her reason for burying the man in that manner is apparently because of practical considerations. The fear she feels about it is the fear of being discovered by her family at any moment.

I just couldn't explain to them that since there is never enough money for food, there couldn't be any for embalmers, coffinmakers, professional mourners, a cortege, flowers and candles, a Mass, and a place at the cemetery – that was why I had to do what I did.

In the author's comments on the draft of this study (Lacambra-Ayala 1999), she states that "the daughter-in-law loved her father-in-law." Given this, the expense of the burial could have been easily explained to the family because, if she can defy the husband to buy the blanket for herself, then she can justify the expense that this burial would entail. The fact that she does not do so hints at deeper reasons, and these reasons are silenced by the text.

What is not explicit in the story is the woman's reactions to her husband's entreaties not to spend so much. He calls it "compulsive spending," as if it is a sickness and what she buys are useless, unnecessary things. When she declares the burial as an expense that they can not afford to have, it is a decision done on her own. She does not wait for her husband to support her decision.

Equating the burial with the blanket reveals a feeling of resentment on the part of the wife in this story – a buried resentment at the way she is denied money to spend on what she wants. Often cautioned by the husband about their budget, she retaliates unconsciously by declaring the burial as too upsetting on their budget. If she must be denied spending on unnecessary things, then a burial can be considered unnecessary, too. The wrapping up of the corpse in the blanket she bought without the knowledge of the husband, is ironic. Both things entail unnecessary expense and both things are sole decisions of the woman, in defiance of her husband.

A woman is often not given many opportunities to rebel in a direct manner and so feels the need to escape her present reality. This is the conflict experienced by the speaker in "Are you an Arab?" as she tries to escape her present life and self.

Are you an Arab?
 asks my son,
 he spies me weaving a blanket
 about my head,
 he does not understand
 I do this when I tire
 of being in my own country,
 when I am at a loss
 at acting my own self.

She later realizes that pretending to be what you are not is an inane escape. It is futile because it is temporary and inauthentic. Contradictions in the text, however, question this realization. The words "at a loss at acting my own self" are contradictory as acting implies that it is not your true self you are presenting to the world. Even if it is her own personality that the speaker is portraying, still it is a portrayal, not a spontaneous exhibition of who she is. Her true self is not articulated and in her pretending, she even needs the right blanket to look like an authentic Arab. This manifests a woman who cannot really articulate her own feelings and ideas and needs other devices to amplify her self.

This escape motif can again be seen in the poem, "On the bus." The persona, who is a passenger in the bus, feels like a

domesticated bird that longs to soar free but cannot because of earthbound restrictions. She wants to say what she wants to say and go where she wants to go but is paralyzed by external factors. She can only utter inane phrases and conventional greetings and feel helpless in her conviction that she cannot soar because her wings are trimmed. If she tries to follow her desire to break free, she feels that she will topple down and crash on the ground.

This longing to be free to do what one wants can also be seen in "This way I learned you." The persona in this poem is advocating rebellion as an alternative to suicide. For persons whose thoughts are "asphyxiating," refusing to live is the "beginning of cowardice and rot."

Why insist on death when it is not
even offered in an alternate
of choices?...
if it is suicide:
there are many ways more fun
more fortunate than to refuse to grow --
be cynical perhaps or bite the hand
that feeds you or revile
environ's custom by eating
meat and flowers raw. THEY
will object for certain...

Living dangerously in this poem is pictured as a different means of surviving life. It is seen as experiencing a different aspect of living, not perhaps the one that "THEY," the society, will approve but certainly something that is more novel and invigorating.

Apparently, this going against society's conventions is preferable to suicide because killing yourself will be the end to any thought you want to express. What the poem refers to as "asphyxiating" is the difficulty of going against the prevailing ideology of a certain society. A deviant, however noble the intentions are, is sometimes frowned on by one's society for breaking the rules. What takes away the sting from this is that the poem regards this deviation from society's customs as like the experience of the pagan who discovered the first fire. It is dangerous, but it is exciting—it is

fulfilling your potentials and it is living life to the full. And doing that, living dangerously, is infinitely better than being dead.

The stifled impulse to break free is the subject of another poem entitled "Reception door." The persona in this poem is conscious of repressed feelings and ideas trying to surface through a façade of social calm and poise.

Teeth of cold, invisible steel saws
creep from behind, cut through the neck
like betrayals of subconscious slipping
through speech in casual conversations
revealing fear wedged in – or is it oozing out
from its great store inside – the crannies
of the social poise...

However, she controls and suppresses these longings, these movements of the soul trying to break free from concealment.

...Stand on two feet
and say the irrevocable syllables with grace,
preserve the outward balance. Conceal
oh very well conceal the frozen, or when it moves...
until the space of winging through inside
is just one breath away, or then is gone, is gone.

Inner drives are gestures of the soul caged in a body and controlling these hardens the body until the fluttering of the soul is no more. This repression produces calluses that grow both ways, the hardened mask that shows outside the body and the frozen part that destroys the soul inside the body.

This is the eventual consequence of such a suppression of the soul and apparently this is the inner female experience that the speaker wants to show. What is not spoken, however, is the reason why the persona must repress inner longings and voices. The words "social poise" seem to indicate that society demands outward civility from people. As the title indicates, you have to stand at the reception door and greet guests with charm and grace regardless of what you feel inside. To be outspoken of things and desires that society does not

approve of would be a risk in a society that demands decorum and civilized conduct.

The woman fears that continued suppression of these longings will fix the mask in place until it takes over the real person. Even knowing this, she still is wary of expressing herself fully and can only despair at her suppressed soul. This acceptance, however, is not thorough. There is an underlying tone of longing and complaint at the way society controls the responses and emotions of a person. The words "oh very well conceal the frozen" indicate that the speaker does not really agree with the idea but she sees no other option but to do what society dictates.

These undertones of uncertainty and bitterness can again be seen in an early poem of the author. In "Dried prunes stuck on a bannister," the speaker meditates on lost dreams and illusions. The comparison of the present life of the speaker and the dried prune presents a grim picture of a woman suffering from attacks of insecurity and questioning her own significance. Saddled with domestic concerns, she questions if she should remain faithful to those old virtues and ideals now that other priorities have stuck her on another path. The opening lines of the poem present a picture of someone restlessly finding something to do after her duties are done.

eye me travel up and down the stairs
 thinking of deaths after suppers
 and the quiet when the storms go
 and lights lie small and burned.

Her dissatisfaction with her life is evident in this questioning of her current lifestyle so different from the one she envisioned when she was young. The imagery of dried prunes and bannisters emphasizes the state of mind of the speaker.

Were we truthful to the freshness
 before the cocoon of it, were we
 dyed and dried or are we really
 as the brownness as the sturdy
 we assume? Were we ever fruit
 on truly trees or merely
 dried prunes stuck on bannisters –

The word "stuck" in association with "dried prunes" gives off a portrait of a woman who is doubting her abilities. She is questioning whether she is really born with the gift or if she is just deluding herself. Whatever enthusiasm and ideas she had before, these are no more as she is now in a "cocoon" of other concerns which has shriveled her freshness. She is now only an insignificant dried prune stuck on a bannister.

Another kind of questioning woman, one who moves from questions of herself to questions about her surroundings, can be seen in "How solid the country is." The poem is a caustic commentary on the apathy of people against disaster and societal concerns. The country is rocked with economic and political problems but its citizens continue with their lives as if nothing monumental has happened. This poem portrays the amazement and concern of a woman who questions the insouciant attitude of people who turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to what is happening around them. In strong language, the speaker says,

we are so goddamn unshakably stolid and remote from
 all the social conventions and world affairs from all
 the sophisticated manipulations of power
 and gain
 have remained contentedly poor, undazed by fame
 provincial and free how solid
 the country is

There are underlying tones of admiration in the poem. The reference to the poor man's fixed preoccupation with his own life and livelihood is a trait which has enabled him to survive even in the face of chaos around him. The poem is not so much a criticism of economic and political events, but a comment on this Filipino trait, which is at the same time admirable and offensive.

If people actively protest against these injustices and corruption, though, they are either ignored or violently suppressed. The poem, "Poem for the Department of Education, Culture and Sports," focuses on rallies and demonstrations, which are suppressed by the authorities. When asked to produce a "literature of bitterness" that portrays this scenario, the speaker laments that she cannot do so because the dominant ideology sees this silencing of demonstrators with firehoses as right. It is regarded by authorities as just giving these people a free bath to "cleanse the scum off our minds." Producing a literature which depicts bitter, ugly things in society is useless and we remain hungry for truth, impressionable and bitter.

This social awareness can again be seen in two of the author's latest poems. In "Time condition," the speaker portrays scene after scene of the economic deprivation experienced by many people.

we ration everything so it will last
ink, paper, passion...
we ration reason and education
all things that are essential
there is too much sugar in the market...
we ration bitterness...
we ration our thoughts to students
demonstrations, politicians...
until there is nothing left for the poor
quiet unhappy children

The choice of the pronoun "we" gives the poem a general tone. The omission of specific people directly responsible for this condition gives the poem a universal effect. It tells us that the fault is not just with the government or some sectors but with all of us. It is a cycle that goes on and on until one perhaps breaks the chain and stops rationing things and ideas to other people.

"Hard Times are Hard Times" is slightly more forceful than "Time condition." Written in capital letters, the poem makes a statement on the pollution and other environmental effects brought about by modernization. Addressed to the "God of our fathers and of modern times," it also presents the displacement of ethnic tribes by factories which poison their sources of food and cause illness among

their people. The poem's entreaty to the gods portrays a picture of a people's helplessness in the face of industrialization and also a hidden resentment at the gods who seem blind and indifferent to their misery.

"Shapes of darkness" is a poem presented from the perspective of a speaker who is painfully aware of the dark circumstances in society nowadays. The four stanzas in the poem paint a dismal shape that speaks of the grim realities in our environment today. The first stanza paints a portrait of pain and despair in a family. It describes a scene of horror and lack of peace where members of the family cower in fear inside the house due to the violence outside which may enter the safety of their home.

The second stanza is another shape of darkness, a sick child tended by the speaker, trying to cool the fever by bathing the child in ice water. The third stanza speaks of the disillusionment and suffering of tribal people. The scene described here is that of a tribe trying to escape the pitfalls set by the government and the temptations of civilization. In the fourth stanza, the speaker alludes to the alienation that is happening among people, who partition the earth in order to own a piece of property but in the end own nothing at all.

The shapes of darkness presented in these stanzas indicate the wide horizon of the speaker who sees the grim circumstances outside of her own immediate world. There is an underlying tone of despair in the poem that speaks of the speaker's concern about what is happening to the world today.

Another type of woman in the author's texts is the woman who harbors an adventurous nature and questions the limits that society has placed on her existence. In "The horse poem," women are portrayed as fragile creatures whose adventurous inclinations lead them to tragedy. In this allegorical poem, a bunch of roses decide to ride a horse but all end up scattered on the way, victims of the horse's rampage. If roses symbolize women, then we have a picture of females as having delicate natures, which do not prepare them for the rigors of adventure and the violent response of their attackers.

tracing the *victims* is no problem
 with petals strewn wildly
 on the way
 in any time and clime of roses
 they really should not ride
 the horses

These women's natural habitat is the home and if taken out of this natural environment, even by their own decision and will, they encounter tragedy. They become victims of their own unnatural desire because they have overreached the limits that nature has placed on their lives. Apparent in this poem is the notion that to be different, to want for something more that is not natural to you, is dangerous. It will only lead you to tragedy. A woman becomes a victim not only of others but also of her own deviant behavior.

Looking at the subtext of this story, we see a picture of women who try to go beyond their natural limits. It is not natural for roses to ride a horse, but they still do it. On a figurative level, the idea of women, wanting more than what is natural to them, is put forth in this poem. They may have come to a bad end but the fact that they have tried to discover other worlds speaks of the possibility of another existence not usually offered to women. It may be a dangerous inclination, but the fact that they did it questions the dominant paradigm of women as fragile creatures only suited for certain types of occupations. Their falling victims of the horse is a compromise to the dominant ideology which boxes women in fixed occupations of interest.

Another of the author's works, which covertly puts forth a question on the role of women, is the story "The butcher." In this story, women are portrayed as sex objects with which men pass idle time. The whole story does not follow the pyramid structure of traditional short stories where resolution follows climax which follows conflict which follows exposition. It revolves around the buying of women's breasts and ends without resolving the issue. The man, who wanted to buy the breasts, does so out of restlessness and boredom. He spends time by making ridiculous requests which are indicative of a deep-seated desire to be entertained in a boring and idle moment.

But then – *what's so strange about wanting to buy two kilos of women's breasts when that was all one wanted to buy in the first place*, I murmured to myself as I turned back on the butcher and moved away...

I could have, matter-of-factly nodded my head, patronizingly, at the women's breast for sale, not at this hour anyway, but that he knew where delicate of laces sometimes, or brown and bare like coconuts...
 Oh dull day for those who do not want to play!

Whether the butcher is guilty of actually knowing where to get breasts, the impression that the reader is left with is the reaction of the narrator, not the butcher. The placing of too much importance on the breasts makes them just a commodity needed by men to fuel their fantasies. The breasts, then, and, by extension, women, are portrayed as just a panacea for boredom and restlessness. This short vignette focuses too much on the breast imagery and only later gets philosophical about the angst that the narrator feels during the last lines of the story.

Patriarchal Ideology

The expression or portrayal of an experience, be it internal or external, varies from one person to another, one culture to another, and one literary text to another. Disparate factors condition this expression and in the case of literary expression, make it varied as well as complex. That the experience is a female experience only serves to make the recording of these more intricate and tricky. In many cultures, the woman subscribes to the dominant ideology of her culture which often restricts her to a pattern set by the conventions of that ideology. In societies which follow a patriarchal orientation, women's experiences are regarded as trifling and they have been asked to put aside their concerns and grievances because there are more serious matters that must come first. The woman has been conditioned to think that her experiences are trivial and parochial because they are mostly confined to her home and family. Compared to men's experiences, which dwell on the concerns of the outside world, women's experiences appear to be insignificant and therefore not worthy of attention. Their complaints, grievances, and inner conflicts

are not really grievous and weighty so most of the time, these are ignored and even silenced as too trivial when there are other concerns supposedly more serious.

The many omissions and tensions seen in the literary texts critically analyzed above would indicate that there are some beliefs and convictions that are not allowed to be given a voice in the text. Even the author's autobiography, supposedly an account of her own life, contains some gaps that speak of things unsaid by the author. There are omissions and silences in the accounts—perhaps understandably as one cannot include everything in literature—which indicate underlying tones of adherence to a particular ideology's rules of what is acceptable or not.

According to Pierre Macherey (Sim, 1995), this is the result of ideology which imposes its silences on literature. A society's ideology is usually not encoded in explicit rules of conduct for all the world to see. Usually, because it is followed by everybody, it is taken for granted and so becomes an unwritten law. Given form in literature, this ideology influences the way the message of the text is presented and dissenting voices against this ideology are silenced.

In an interview done by Edna Manlapaz and Marjorie Evasco (1996), the author claims that she does not write in a womanly manner.

Evasco: Is it a problem, being a writing woman and revealing too much?

Lacambra-Ayala: I think a lot of writers are more woman than I am. I feel sometimes that when I write poetry, I'm very manly. Did you notice? Sometimes I read a book of poems written by a woman, let's say a very feminine poem by Christine Godinez Ortega. And then a review by Prof. Leonard Casper comes out likening her poetry to mine and I get so shocked. I feel that my poetry is manly.

Manlapaz: What do you mean?

Lacambra-Ayala: Style, the way I use the language.

Manlapaz: What would you describe as womanly language?

Lacambra-Ayala: Delicate. Sweet. It's in the choice of words and subject matter.

Based on what the author thinks as womanly writing, we can glean a part of the belief that influenced the production of the texts. Women are thought to be emotional and delicate. Consequently, they also write in an emotional and delicate manner. Now, wanting to be associated with this kind of writing, the texts tend to a more objective and philosophic writing style. There is a contradiction here that allows the texts to be open about presenting female experiences, on one hand, and, on the other, become 'defiant' of the way society regards women's experiences by writing about them in a manly manner.

Aside from this consideration, there are other factors that influence the language of the texts under study. When asked about the social milieu of her poetry:

Evasco: Do you like living here in Davao?

Lacambra-Ayala: It is such a different milieu from Manila. The air is different. And since there are so many big open spaces, my lines have become shorter... one to two lines for every verse. As sparse as there are people in the wide, open spaces.

Evasco: Sparseness of movement and sound?

Lacambra-Ayala: I hear people chopping wood and so I chop...

Evasco: The changed rhythms of your environment did this to your lines?

Lacambra-Ayala: And things become more visual.

Manlapaz: Visual rather than aural?

Lacambra-Ayala: Well, rather than abstract. In earlier times, when I had a lucid idea, I wrote so much, used long lines, convoluted words. But what I really wanted to say did not come out. Here, what I wanted to say I could see...

Clearly, the surroundings of the author influenced the writing of her texts. The chopping of her poetic lines leave out some ideas that may be thought to be superfluous but which may have added to the easy interpretation of the texts.

The author's early background also in the University of the Philippines may also be a factor that influenced the texts. By her own admission, the author feels to be lacking an adequate philosophical background (Lacambra-Ayala, 1998b). The literary texts

make up for this because the author's works are often profound and philosophical.

Feminist considerations can also be taken into account when talking about the ideology surrounding the literary works under study. In the Philippines, the prevailing ideology in terms of female expression and identity supports a patriarchal system which ensures the domination of men and the subordination of women.

Philippine society is patriarchal, that is, its ideology and system of social organization is based on father-dominance which underlies the dichotomous dualism of many cultures. The paradigmatic dominance – subordination dualism between husband and wife, a dualism that is intrinsically sexual, involves the extension of the attribution of superiority to all that is perceived as masculine and of inferiority to all that is perceived as feminine (Gorospa 1997).

In such a condition of society, the woman is imprisoned in a role fashioned for her by that society. Because it is the male which rules that society, the female often comes out on the losing side as the male interprets her according to his own image of what he wants in a woman.

In literature, the woman writer is pressured not to present an objective, realistic picture of her sex that may be contrary to the image that societal conventions have constructed for the woman. To do so would be to proclaim herself a dissenter, one who challenges the rules of the powers that be. Even feminist critics, such as Elaine Showalter, argue against feminist fantasies of a wild zone of female consciousness or culture outside of patriarchy. In her essay, "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," she declares that "there can be no writing or criticism outside of the dominant culture" (qtd. in Belsey, 1997). A writer's consciousness is in a way controlled by the current ideology of a period and place and to go against this ideology is to run the risk of being silenced or even being labeled mad and a deviant.

A literary text then may become a place of struggle where dominant and muted voices speak to express some human experience.

In the literary works analyzed in the preceding pages, the submerged meanings offer a different picture from the ones that are apparent in the texts. On the surface, they are the stereotypes of the female archetypes that have dominated the literary pages for a long time. Underneath these images, however, are underlying tones of complaint and dissatisfaction with the existing social order which limit the way they can act as women.

Some texts question, probe, and even negate the social reality seen in the external world. To say, however, that these literary females are subversive would be to exaggerate the complaining tone of these women. They protest and strain against their social ties but in veiled, covert ways that manifest their capitulation to the dominant ideology. The acquiescence with popular beliefs and perceptions of femininity are seen in the way women are presented within the patriarchal definitions of femininity. The literary texts' apparent perpetuation of female stereotypes only proves that indeed, women are constructed by a society's culture.

Summary and Conclusion

In their entirety, the literary works of Tita Lacambra-Ayala included in this study manifest six images of women. These are:

The Mother

The mother is portrayed as a noble and loving woman who is willing to sacrifice herself for the comfort and security of her children. She is always there for them and even if the whole world would revile them, they can always depend on their mother's support and love. Even if she is rejected and abandoned by her children, she does not voice any anger or condemnation for those actions. She sees her fulfillment in her children and she identifies herself with them so that, without their presence in her life, she is incomplete. Her usefulness has to be affirmed by her children, otherwise she loses her purpose in living.

Underneath these conventional images of the virtuous, self-sacrificing mother is a repressed, unspoken question of her children's place in her life. She makes seemingly idle but bitter remarks about the wonders of motherhood. Unspoken also is the natural anger that a human being feels when he or she is rejected and abandoned by a loved one. The "silent" suffering of the mother in one of the stories is not really silent as her actions speak volumes about the hurt and resentment she feels towards her son. Injected, too, in the stories is the issue of the role of marriage and motherhood in a woman's life as too restricting to one's potentials.

The Wife

The wife in Tita Lacambra-Ayala's literary works is an example of the silent, suffering woman wary of expressing her deepest emotions. She feels the loss of communication with her husband and with others and wants to bridge the gap but is restrained by the other's apathy and nonchalance. She hesitates to be confrontational and can only wait for the other. She is also the epitome of the woman who puts her duties in the home on top of her list. To abandon this responsibility would be to bring the burden of guilt on herself. Even if she is sick, she has to attend to her duties for she cannot abandon them. A man, perhaps, can afford to do so but not the wife whose responsibility is the home.

Submerged beneath this submissive, responsible, and accommodating wife is the woman who is bitter and complains about the indifference of the other person. She derides herself for stupidly waiting for him and even uses disquieting words in referring to the man. The hardworking responsible wife is also not the perfect picture of contentment. She sees the duties as a burden, one that prevents her from doing other things aside from housework. Domestic chores isolate her from real life and confine her to the walls of the house. The dismal view of domestic life heightens this feeling of alienation. The seemingly endless chores in the house prevent her from widening her horizons. In fact, it does just the opposite. It confines the woman in the house and this isolation makes the outside world an alien place for her.

In one story, household demands are part of the "Everything" which pushed the wife to attempt suicide. These are duties that cannot be abandoned and must be attended to by the wife. The demands of marriage and domesticity are harsh realities that must be dealt with for she cannot escape from them. They intrude into her consciousness and permeate her identity.

The Young Girl

This type of female is the one imbued with innocence and a charming unconcern for the darkness of growing up. She is simple and her tastes and preferences are uncluttered by the dictates of society. She ignores difficulties and has a short span of attention, preferring to dwell on the joys rather than the storms. Her illusions are shattered, however, when she grows up. This entry into the world of adulthood leaves her unprepared to deal with its complexity.

Underneath the happy, unconcerned attitude of this female is the disquiet and feeling of insecurity she experiences when confronted with reality. This girl's questions about life begin with this stepping into the threshold of womanhood. Her previous trust and devotion towards older models are now damaged and she experiences uncertainty in her life. Her altered view of the world leaves her confused and irresolute in coping with the harsh reality of adulthood.

The Waiting and Accepting Woman

The waiting, unquestioning woman is a familiar literary character in world literature. She is the type who patiently and with all humility accepts the role that life has given her. She hesitates to take the first step to make her wants known for she might be considered forward and aggressive. She believes that questioning is a waste of time for she cannot change the world. It is better not to think, for questioning and speculating are hard on the nerves.

The underlying tone of complaint and bitterness in the texts, however, belies these images. While it is true that these women wait and accept their fates, their acceptance is not a patient acceptance. It

is more of a resigned acceptance to what they cannot change. Their minds have become icy and their patience has turned cold and this terrible resignation to their lot is what is covertly manifested in the texts. They say it is better not to think but there is a half-mocking tone in this assertion.

The Artist

Among the women characters in the texts under study the artist is the one imbued with a sensitive, creative nature. She sees the grim state of human beings in society and is enveloped in despondency. She wants to dissociate herself from the conventions of society but cannot sustain this desire. In one story, she is independent and scornful of the institutions of society but eventually joins in the adherence to the traditions of that society.

Underneath the alternative lifestyle that the artist is espousing is a contradictory perspective that makes her a conformist. She is a muted voice that is given a chance to voice out her inner desires and preferences and yet retreats back to conformity. She oscillates between these two perspectives as in the case of one story where the artist has children and yet continues her career without a man by her side.

The Questioning Woman

Among the women portrayed in the texts, this woman is the one that does not accurately conform to the archetype of the rebellious woman in literature. Her rebellion is a passive kind of rebellion and takes the form of questionings, which challenge the social order that constructs her reality. She explores religious, economic, even political realities and makes caustic comments about their shortcomings. Many of these explorations center on the hold social rules and conventions have on a person's life. One can either suppress those perceptions and emotions that are not in accord with what the prevailing ideology of a society dictates, or one can rebel against these proprieties and live a fuller life free from inhibitions. Failing these, one can also dream of escape from social restrictions that wither the soul and pretend to be like a bird that is able to soar high to the clouds. Only

one of these women executes an active defiance and she is the woman who defies social protocol on burial traditions. She disregards the accustomed funeral rites by burying her father-in-law in their backyard without the family's knowledge.

The objective, understated, and sometimes humorous manner in which these questionings are done, though, somehow contradicts the protest forwarded in some texts. The texts seem to be divided between an open defiance of society's conventions and following society's rules. In the case of the woman who buried her father-in-law, for example, the story is presented in a humorous manner where the satire is subtly done and is inoffensive to prevailing social taste.

To sum up, there are more questioning women in the forty-one texts under study with the wife coming in second. This is not to say that this questioning trait cannot be found in the other types of women in the text. The tendency to voice questions crosses over to the other women in varying degrees. The women in this category are just slightly more forceful in their complaints and questions than the other types, whose angst and questions are done in a silent or covert manner.

The submerged meanings of the texts that are critically analyzed in the study are extracted from the texts' silences and omissions, which are a result of the prevailing ideology in which the works are written. In terms of women's perceptions and experiences, the dominant ideology pervading the silences in the texts is the patriarchal ideology. Unable to directly and to overtly challenge this ideology, the texts can only express their doubts, questions, and complaints in a furtive and obscure manner.

The women in the literary works included in this paper are a study of contrasts. On the one hand, they are conventional women who adhere to traditional beliefs valued in society. On the other hand, they are women who are not entirely of these beliefs and even question the same. The questionings are addressed to the demands of domesticity in the earlier poems and although they still show to some extent in the later poems, the women in the later poems have now

expanded their horizons. They have begun to question circumstances beyond the domestic world such as political and economic situations.

These alternative images of women are not readily apparent though. To use a word coined by Elaine Showalter (1997), some of the texts included in the study employ a "double-voiced" discourse where two conflicting voices of women can be heard. There is the voice of patriarchy that forwards conventional beliefs and the other voice, a muted voice, that for a time is able to voice out her protest against conventions. In many of the texts, these two voices are found in the same person but in some stories, there are two women embodying two different perspectives. There is a difference between the literary expressions of the early works and the present ones. The latter has a more forceful way of expressing complaints and questions than the earlier works. Again, this is an indication of the general social atmosphere of the society during the period in which they were written. The 1990s can be described as the age of information where there is a relatively more unobstructed way of expressing speech than the previous generations.

As a whole, Tita Lacambra-Ayala's literary texts, specifically, those that are included in the study, have become a battleground where contrasting portrayals of female experiences can be seen. On the surface, they are conforming to the conventional images of a woman and even perpetuating the archetypes of womanhood often seen in literature. The silences and the omissions of the texts, however, give a different view of the female as one who questions current paradigms of what a woman is and lets the reader view a different, perhaps 'defiant,' perspective of the female experience.

The literary works included in this study put forth strong questions against domesticity and the restricting life it offers for the mother and wife, in particular, and for women in general. Seen from this perspective, the texts show a concern for women's experiences and struggles which can even be considered feminist. Maggie Humm (1995) defines feminism as an "ideology of women's liberation, since intrinsic in all its approaches is the belief that women suffer injustice because of their sex" (1995:91). The literary works under study portray

women who to a greater or lesser degree are suffering in their lives. They have questions that speak of an awareness of the deplorable lot they are in. Though they do not take an active, radical stance against the persons and circumstances who have caused this suffering and pain, they struggle with the knowledge that things are not what they ought to be, that there should be a better condition of living than the one they have now. Pervading most of the texts is a feeling of bitter questioning against life and fate.

Moreover, the texts attempt, though unconsciously, to present alternative images of the female perspective in literature. In this regard, then, one can say that the texts exhibit an impulse to feminism in their portrayal of the perspectives and experiences of women. The literary works show a concern for female emancipation in their forwarding of female experiences in an understated and unsentimental manner. The presentation of women's experiences is a gentle subversion of an ideology which paints women as subjective, emotional beings. The female perspectives in the texts are presented not as hysterical complaints of women but as a controlled portrayal of inner desires and beliefs.

The foregrounding of female experiences in the literary texts puts forth the message that women have legitimate concerns and that their experiences are no less trivial than any man's. The fact that their inner conflicts and bitter lot are given space in these literary texts is an indication that literature can be an influential tool for presenting alternative images of women. The different portrayals of women in the texts will hopefully enable repressed women to break free from their rut and make their own ways instead of blindly conforming to society's dictates. The putting forth of female experiences may go a long way in changing the way society regards women's perspectives and experiences.

Several factors contribute to the production of the literary texts of the author. One of the main factors is the patriarchal ideology prevailing in the Philippine society (Gorospe 1997) that sets the standard on womanhood. This standard on what females should be or not be pervade the texts and often silences those actions that do

not actually adhere to this ideal. In the interview done by Manlapaz and Evasco (1996), the author's statement that her poetry is manly confirms the texts, as being situated in a patriarchal culture. The author's belief that womanly language is delicate and sweet is an adherence to the popular stereotype of women as behaving like that and this belief informs the consciousness of her texts.

A delicate manner of writing implies a kind of writing that is insubstantial and therefore not to be taken seriously. Manly language, on the other hand, is the opposite. It is weighty, philosophical, and objective. There is every possibility that it will be taken seriously. This stereotype is fostered by a patriarchal society that sets the standard on what is important or not. The leaning towards philosophy and complex images in the texts is an indication of the texts' serious bent in the desire to be taken as seriously as the texts of male writers.

Ideology, however, seldom works simply. The factors discussed in the preceding paragraphs plus the author's open avowal that she is not a feminist poet (Manlapaz and Evasco 1996) develop into a play of contradictions in the texts. While declaring that she is not feminist, the author nonetheless foregrounds female experiences in a society that does not put much weight in these experiences. While forwarding female perspectives, the texts at the same time use a manly language not often attributed to female authors.

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