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AESTHETIC AND ETHICAL VALUES IN SELECTED PHILIPPINE POEMS AND SHORT STORIES

by

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People (artists and non-artists alike) may believe in and accept two or all of the three theories regarding the functions of art (Benton 1975:51-53). According to one kind of theory, the function of art is to produce just one kind of effect upon its audience: pleasure. It may also inform or instruct, represent or express, but first and foremost it must please. The more pleasure it gives, the better the art. The theory has often been amended to read "aesthetic pleasure" rather than simply pleasure.

The second theory espouses the idea of art as a means of truth or knowledge. Art has even been called the avenue to the highest knowledge available to man and to a kind of knowledge impossible of attainment by any other means.

The third theory believes in art as a means to moral improvement, in which case there is a merging of both the aesthetic and ethics in art.

All the above-mentioned theories have their merits. No one can deny that art can and should give pleasure; but few would wish to assert that pleasure is all that it should give. Great art may please; it may also move, shock, challenge, or change the lives of those who experience it deeply. Pleasure is only one of the many kinds of effects it produces.

The view of art as a means to moral improvement requires an inevitable merging of the demands for aesthetics and ethics, specifically, in the crafting of the work as well as in analyzing it. Art and morality are indeed intimately related, and neither functions wholly without the other. Although most works of literature do not exist to teach a moral lesson, they can teach valuable moral lessons through explicit or implicit presentation. Of all the arts the relation of literature to morality is most obvious.

Literature achieves this moral effect by presenting characters and situations through which the reader can deepen his own moral perspectives. By reflecting on other people's problems and conflicts, which usually have a complexity that his own daily situations do not possess, he can learn from them without himself having to undergo in his personal life the same moral conflicts or make the same moral decisions. The reader can view such situa tions with a detachment that he can seldom achieve in daily life when he is immersed in the stream of action. By viewing these situations objectively and reflecting on them, he is enabled to make his own moral decisions more wisely when life calls on him in turn to make them. Literature can be a stimulus to moral reflection unequalled perhaps by any other, for it presents the moral choice in its total context with nothing of relevance omitted. Literature, perhaps more than anything else, exercises leavening influence on the temper of a man's moral life.

Plato is said to be the first champion in the Western world of the moralistic view of art. In the Ion he holds that the chief end of poetry is pleasure, but he also believes that it ought to teach virtue and truth. In The Republic he attempts to set forth the ideal state, the society which embodies his ethical ideals. His ethical views are inseparably connected with his view of the universe, his view of man, and his view of society or the state. The good is bound with and concerns every problem in life (Benton 1975:54-55)

In The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, Plato's pupil, one finds the first systematic treatment of ethics in western civilization. At a time when the prevailing view of the poet was as an ethical teacher, Aristotle believed that the function of poetry was the giving of a certain refined pleasure. He held the idea that for a normal and healthy public, the proper aesthetic pleasure is possible only when the requirements of morality are

satisfied; and so a certain moral effect he regards as inevitably bound up with the exercise of the poet's art. Yet this is not to say that the poet's aims are educational or didactic, or that moral improvement is the chief end of poetry. The fact is that Aristotle seems to distingush between the aesthetic purpose and the moral effect; the former being to him essential, the latter incidental.

Moving forward through the centuries of literary history, we add the theories of other writers and critics who believed in the double-function of literature. The Roman poet Horace (65- B.C.) states his artistic principle thus: "to delight and to instruct." Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) in An Apology for Poetry declares that the end of poetry is "to teach and delight," and insists that the poet is in a class with the philosopher as a teacher of morality. Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), agreeing with Sidney on the ends of poetry and citing as his precedents many of the ancient poets, asserts his intention in the Faerie Queene of fashioning "a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." In An Essay of Dramatic Poetry John Dryden (1631-1700) is in essential agreement with Plato on delight as the chief end of poetry, though he feels that the poet should also instruct. John Milton (1608-1674) announces in the opening lines of Paradise Lost that his purpose is to "justify the ways of God to man." The poet, he believes, should "inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility . . . and set the affections in right tune."

Very much the same point of view is apparent in more modern critics. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in Biographia Literaria thinks that "truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end" of poetry.

In A Defense of Poetry Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) boldly insists that the "great instrument of moral good is the imagination" and the poet is the teacher of "the highest

wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory." William Hazlitt (1778-1830) in On Poetry in General calls poetry "an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature." In The Study of Poetry Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) says that men turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." T. S. Eliot, described by Sutton and Foster (1963:140) as the "chief poet and literary essayist of this age," states: "Though we may read literature merely for pleasure, or 'entertainment' or of 'aesthetic enjoyment,' this reading never affects simply a sort of special sense: it affects us as entire human beings; it affects our moral and religious existence" (Eliot in Smith and Parks 1966:727).

At this juncture, we ask the question: "What is literature's contribution to the growth and nurture of morality? Josefina F. Loria gives her answer in The Role of Literature in Transmitting Values;

> The reader . . . gleans from literature all the values that civilized men keep. The dignity of man, gratitude, self-discipline, justice, friendship, honor, tolerance and forgiveness of other's failings strengthen or improve personal convictions as they reverberate in the eloquent and suggestive language of literature.
>
> There is no surer way of transmitting values than through literature. The moral virtues that lend to the good life that we all seek are all in the stories that mirror men's beliefs (1976: 22).

A follow-up question may confront the Seventh-day Adventist literature teacher: "What should be the rationale of literature teaching?"

The following are suggested as the rationale for the teaching of literature in SDA schools:

1. Literature helps the students expand their understanding of humankind, of themselves, of reality, and of God and His created world.

2. Literature helps students find meaning and value in their lives and in the universe and become more valuable people.

3. Literature brings students into acquaintance with the best that is written and develops in the students a love for áreading and appreciation of good literature.

4. Literature develops the creative potential of students and appreciation of creativity in others.

5. Literature develops in the students sensitivity to language and to literary craftsmanship.

Because this essay deals with Filipino-authored literary pieces, the writer will give the reader a little background on the beginnings and growth of Philippine literature in English.

A Brief History of Philippine Literature in English

Filipino literature in English has a rich setting. It broke soil in a country of over seven thousand islands fringed with palms and coral beaches and teeming with plant and animal life.

Early Filipino writing in English did not have a native tradition to guide it. The first writers in the adopted tongue had to plot their own course and set up their own bearings, or they had to go by the literary traditions of England and America. But the early Filipino writers in English had a rich cultural background. For centuries Filipino literature had been written in many native tongues, and in at least five major languages: Iloko, Pampango, Tagalog, Visayan, and Bikol. It had also been written in Spanish. English is the newest tool that the Filipino writers have acquired, and yet, after only fifty years of its use, the Filipinos have produced in English a body of literature much richer and far more promising than what they have written in any other language.

The growth of Philippine literature in English began with the Occupation of Manila by the American forces on August 13, 1898. The U. S. Military Government was set up and seven city schools were reopened. The work in these schools was a continuation of the Spanish system, with English as the only additional subject. General Arthur MacArthur considered the establishment of schools as the most potent move toward the complete pacification of the Philippines. Time proved that he was right. The schools not only succeeded in pacifying the Filipinos, but English became the greatest agent in modernizing and democratizing the Philippines and its people.

In April, 1900, by virtue of President McKinley's directives to the Philippine Commission, English became the official medium of instruction in the public schools. In order to accelerate the pacification drive, schools were established in all parts of the Philippines as soon as teachers became available. The early teachers were taken directly from the U. S. army. To augment the small number of American teachers, the Philippine Normal School was founded in 1901 ". . . to train Filipinos in the art of teaching, and who will eventually take charge of elementary education." Shortly afterwards, on July 1, 1901, six hundred American teachers sailed from San Francisco on the transport *Thomas*. They arrived in Manila on August 21 of the same year. These six hundred were the advance guard of a strong civilian army that was to follow in yearly waves of varying numbers until 1933.

These teachers introduced, among other agents of enlightenment, many American and English writers and thinkers -- Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, Irving, Bryant, Poe. Emerson, Longfellow, Frost, T. S. Eliot, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, Joyce, and a host of other world writers. The works of these writers were to be recited and were to set the pace for the early Filipino writers in

English. They were to stimulate the inexperienced Filipino writers. They were to enrich the country's cultural soil and prepare for rich and varied harvests. The new literature was to become the most bountiful and lasting harvest of all.

Authors write about their own experiences and their dreams, the richer the language they write in, the better; and the larger their audience, the more fortunate. And if that language happens to be the language of the world, as English is, and commands a worldwide audience, as English does, so much the better. English, the language in which the world's greatest literature is written, has proved a most adequate tool for the use of Filipino writers. Philippine literature in English is far and away the most varied, the most exciting, the most advanced writing that has developed in this country (Ramos and Valeros 1964:1-3).

This essay endeavors to demonstrate in the analyses of two Filipino-authored poems and two short stories not only their aesthetic but also their ethical worth. These poems and stories were written by published, award-winning Filipino poets and authors. The analyses focus on the aesthetic elements of poetry (form and structure, theme or meaning, tone or attitude, prosody, imagery, and symbolism) and the short story (plot, setting, characters, point of view, and theme). The ethical values are also pointed out.

The analyses do not claim to be exhaustive. What the essay tries to do is to give the literature teacher some kind of guide as he analyzes the poems and stories that he takes up in his classes.

THE POEMS

SONG FOR A DRY SEASON
Emmanuel Torres

It is a wonder how on a fine day like this
With the sun spilled on the hardstained planks of walls,
The wind lolloping, the birds singing and singing,
We pick up broken pieces and are poor.

Though nothing has changed our lean and hardwood house,
We still can bear our faces on the cracked glass
And be glad that our pain is personal, be glad
The bed is in one corner, the table nailed in place.

No special feast lies on the breakfast table;
It is rice and fish and coffee steaming and steaming.
There is no wine but a China jug of water
Will do to make us relish appetite.

Everything is spare and useful to keep alive
Talk -- such as the rough-grained texture of table,
The stove burning, the floorboards creaking and creaking.
Familiarity still fails to blunt our senses.

Somewhere rich relations are fattening and fattening
On surplus, yet ours is the nearer country of plenty
As your full breast tames that babe's loud hunger and
Your thighs conceive of islands green with legend.

This lot may not be worth a curse. All is
Within reach of want as long as love is able.
That sunhammered tree outside our crooked window
Manages some leaves in a dry season.

As the title suggests, this is a poem about a dry season which is dry in the sense that the persona is poor, but who, in spite of his poverty, manages to see the brightest side of things and to make do with the deprived conditions under which he lives. The conflict here is clear between the conditions of extreme poverty and the attitude of cheerfulness and what this attitude sees of abundance in his environment.

The diction is very well-defined between the two elements of tension in the poem. For example, the objects of poverty are pictured in the words: "broken pieces"; "our lean and hardwood house"; "cracked glass"; "no special feast"; "rice and fish and coffee"; "there is no wine"; "everything is spare and useful"; "floorboards creaking and creaking"; "the sunhammered tree outside our crooked window"; "dry season."

The words that bespeak his attitude of seeing abundance and the things around him are: "it is a wonder"; "a fine day"; "sun spilled"; "the wind lolloping"; "the birds singing and singing"; "we pick up broken pieces" (showing willingness to make do with the broken pieces); be glad for several things: that his pain is personal, that he has a bed which is in one corner, that he has a table, that there is a "China jug of water/Will do to make us relish appetite"; "everything is spare and useful to keep alive."

The persona says that he has rich relatives "fattening/On surplus, yet ours is the nearer country of plenty." What he means is that abundance does not have to be measured

by the bulk of material goods one possesses. To him, these are what comprise "nearer country of plenty": the full breast of his wife that can feed their baby's "loud hunger" and the good health of the woman in connection with which he imagines "islands green with legend"; "then all is/Within reach of want as long as love is able"; and "That sunhammered tree outside our crooked window/Manages some leaves in a dry season." The persona sees abundance and feels contentment in whatever he has because there is love.

The poem presents two factors of conflict: the actual poverty as against his healthy attitude of cheerfulness and of seeing abundance even in the poverty of his condition. We can see that it is his attitude of cheerfulness that triumphs over the other factor of the conflict, which is the poverty.

The values of familial love, appreciation of the home, gratefulness for what the persona has, optimism, cheerfulness amid poverty, and patience can be gleaned from this poem.

The poem, written in quatrains, has an irregular meter. The lines contain between 10-14 syllables that end either in masculine or feminine rhymes.

As if to echo the sense, the word "wonder" in the first line of the first stanza requires the reader to pause. An onomatopoetic effect is "heard" when we say the spondaic "cracked glass" in line two of the second stanza. We "feel" the "rough-grained texture" of the table (line two, fourth stanza) height ened by the hard, harsh sounds of *gh* , *g* , and *d* . The song-like effect of the alliteration in "wind lolloping", "birds singing and singing", "coffee steaming and steaming", "floorboards creaking and creaking", and "rich relations are fattening and fattening" enhance the image the title projects.

AN OLD MAN AT MID-DAY
Merlie Alunan

Through a slit between the wooden slats
By the kitchen stove where I was standing,
He looked no more than a thumb's length tall.
He would not see or hear me if I call.
Among the stunted shrubs limp with heat
He merged, a scarecrow in rags dragging
Its feet. I seemed to hear as he passed
The gravel crunching, hissing of dead grass.
He bent -- to right a twig, or pick up
An old man's booty in summer, wood
To raise an evening's humble fire.
I would never see from where I stood
What his eyes saw past the sapling grove,
But oh, why in my gut this sudden cold?

The poem presents this scene: the persona, while standing by the kitchen stove, watches through a "slit between the wooden slats" an old man limping by. He sees him pick up firewood that would probably be used to cook the evening meal. From where he stands, the persona could see the old man looking beyond the grove of young trees. This gesture awakes in the persona an awareness that leaves him with a sudden coldness in the gut.

The last line of the poem expresses the persona's prescience of his own inevitable death at the appointed time. He is not sick or old, but he sees in the deterioration manifest in the old man his own future decay.

The poem succeeds in presenting images of decay and death. We see these in the words and phrases used: "old man"; "thumb length's tall"; "he would not see or hear me if I call" (hinting failing eyesight and weakened hearing); "stunted shrubs limp with heat"; "a scarecrow in rags dragging its feet"; "dead grass"; "wood" (firewood).

The tension in the poem is more abstract, a metaphysical one. Although it is not stated in the poem, it is posited between the observer and the observed. The tension is

between the health and strength of today (represented by the persona) and the expected coming of deterioration and death (represented by the old man).

The values in the poem are not insisted upon but implied. These are empathy and compassion felt by the persona and in the old man's part, a willingness to struggle against poverty and physical decay. We admire the way he goes about the routines of living while in the midst of deterioration and death.

The poem is dominantly iambic with a few anapaests thrown in to create variety and avoid monotony. The harsh sounds of the *g*'s in the two stressed words "rags dragging" in line six reinforce the metaphor of a scarecrow dragging its feet.

THE SHORT STORIES

RECESSIONAL
Edilberto K. Tiempo

When the story, told in the omniscient author point of view and set in an unspecified Philippine town, begins, we see sixty-one-year-old Lola Tinay watching disdainfully through the window the funeral procession of a poor man. She observes that the crude coffin is "just planks of wood nailed together and daubed a dirty brown." She even notices that only twenty-three people are following the coffin borne on the shoulders of four men.

Lola Tinay smiles to herself because she knows that when her time comes she would have a grand, well-attended funeral.

She became a widow at twenty-nine and when she was thirty-three, already a grandmother, she joined the *cofradia,* a Catholic church organization because it seemed the

thing to do for those who regularly went to church. And church was mainly a ritual with her. Paying the monthly due of ten centavos would assure her of a dream funeral -- complete with a heavy garlanded town hearse, a priest garbed in his finery, a band playing a mournful funeral march, bells tolling, and a long line of *cofradia* members accompanying the dead body to its final resting place.

It was for this dream that she stuck to the little town even when her favorite grandchildren had gone away.

But this dream clashes head-on with a complication. Fermin, her favorite grandson working in Jolo, writes that he needs help because Mayay his wife is not well and could not take care of the baby. Sometime in the past the couple had asked her to live with them: "Your home is where we are Lola." Fermin and his two older sisters had been brought up by Lola Tinay when their parents died one after the other when they were small children.

When Lola Tinay was first invited by Fermin and Mayay to live with them, she had many excuses. She said Jolo was far away, it was like going to another country. The islands there -- when she was shown a map -- were so small everything could be swept off by big winds, it seemed; in an earthquake they could easily crack open or perhaps even sink.

What is really holding Lola Tinay from going to Jolo and living with Fermin's family is her dream of a pompous funeral. If she goes to Jolo she would forfeit this funeral. This dream is encouraged by her granddaughter Basilia with whom she has been staying for many years now. Basilia has this inordinate love of possessions. She owns a rug -- she is known to be the only one who owns a rug in town -- which she displays only when she expects visitors and guests. All the while, Lola Tinay knows that she is staying on in the town from pure selfishness. And staying on is feeding Basilia's own selfish pride.

Fortunately, before everything is too late, Lola Tinay comes to her senses. She wires Fermin telling him that she would come with a hired help.

The story's plot presents a conflict between the material and the spiritual. The dramatization of the story is more subtle because Lola Tinay believes that the grave and the preparation for her death is the more spiritual, and any other occasion in her life is merely material. When we look at the story on the physical level, the central character, Lola Tinay, seems to think that the true spiritual concern is the matter of her death, and the material concern is the need of her grandson. At first, she believes that the matter of her death should receive priority over anything else.

In the end, Lola Tinay realizes that the preparation for her death is material ostentation, vanity, and pride and that answering the need of Fermin's family constitutes real spiritual value. This is the story's theme. Her shallowness her pride, her love of display, her faith in the *cofradia* system all vanish when she discovers that what really matters is her commitment to her grandson's family. Now that she has forsaken her old faith -- faith in the *cofradia* system -- she can tell Lantaca her cat: "We are going to another country." This statement symbolizes the new set of mind and attitude that Lola Tinay now possesses. This reflects the triumph of true faith -- a real interpretation of faith. Her earthly life may be ending, but symbolically (strengthened by the title "Recessional"), a new life is beginning for her.

Helping to reveal meaning are the character of Basilia and her materialism, represented by the rug. These symbols heighten the shallowness and the falseness of the lives lived by her and Lola Tinay.

When Lola Tinay decides to go to Jolo, we find her exemplifying the values of sacrifice and selflessness, loyalty and commitment to family, generosity, and humility.

THE DISTANCE TO ANDROMEDA
Gregorio Brillantes

This story, set in a town in Tarlac and told in the present tense in an omniscient author point of view, opens with thirteen-year-old Ben watching a movie with his friend Pepe. The science-fiction film depicts the last men, women, and children, survivors of Earth's Final War, searching for a new home in the vast heavens. The movie ends with the Earth people gathered beneath their rocket ship "looking out across the plain to the hills green in the light of the new sun."

When Ben comes out of the movie house, he suddenly feels a deeper awareness of the "hum of the universe, the movement of planets and stars." He tries, but fails to communicate to Pepe this "hum and movement" he feels. Arriving home, he finds that everyone, except his father who has not arrived yet, is in his "proper" place: his mother and aunt rocking slightly in the roofed swing in the front yard; his sister Luz and her boyfriend Chitong sharing their endless secrets; Remy, his sister-in-law, feeding the baby; Pol, his lawyer-brother, writing at his father's desk; and Pining, the cook, bustling about the old Mayon stove. He sees the rhythm of life around him going in orderly fashion. Everything is in perfect order. And he feels secure.

The family eats when his engineer-father arrives. After supper, the family gathers on the porch and Ben lies down on the grass and looks up at the sky. While lying down he becomes keenly aware of his family and the events that transpired during the day. He feels the spell cast by the far-away planets and the stars enveloping his everyday existence. He experiences a deep meaningfulness of his family life. This deeper meaning is not mentioned in a religious way, but the implication is clear. The far-away and mysterious influence he feels after seeing the movie is really his initial attempts at searching for meaning, particularly religion and the moral values in the world. This new awareness resembles a rebirth and a discovery for him in his search for meanings which ultimately leads to God.

The implied conflict here is between the power of the earth centered on war (there's the implication of a holocaust subtly hinted at by the mention of the Third World War) and the power of the Infinite or the spiritual.

Gregorio Brillantes, the author, provides the following comment:

> What matters, says the story, is not the distance to Andromeda but the distances between human beings and between them and God, their ultimate destiny. Love is a bridge and a communion. Even as Ben and his family are home "in the summer of the year" of human life, they are in a sense travelers, too, together with all men, on the ship of earth, "moving through space and night" toward their final destiny, as the exiles in the spaceship of the film travel toward their planet - home. The story is about distances, destinations, departures, homecomings; several touches point to this central idea of journey and arrival, the boy's sense of distances, nearnesses, so to speak: physical, emotional, spiritual. Ben himself has journeyed closer to a knowledge of God and deeper into the warmth and love of his earthly home.

We find in the story the father's values of industry (he provides material comfort for his family), filial concern, love, and thoughtfulness (he brings a toy dump truck for his little grandson; during supper he gives Ben the chicken's heart and liver; he promises Ben they would go fishing and hunting; he praises his wife for being the "best wife and mother in the world"; he shows interest in the case Pol is handling), love for and faith in God (he tells Ben: "Go to bed now, son -- early Mass tomorrow."), kindness and friendship (patting his stomach, he praises Pining: "You're the best cook in the province of Tarlac."), cooperation, generosity, and helpfulness (after Mass he would see Father Panlilio to talk about the fund drive for the parochial school).

Ben, who remains a consistent character throughout the story, shows the values of politeness, respect, and love for parents and family (he kisses his mother's hand and Tia Dora's upon arriving home; he plays with his little nephew; when his father comes "he takes the briefcase from his father. The simple act is also a ceremony between father and son, implicit with perfect affection."), and friendship (he goes to the movie with his friend Pepe; he would go swimming with Tito and Pepe in San Miguel). We read in this story the theme of meaningful human relationships.

Suggested List of Philippine Poetry and Short Stories

To help the teacher of Philippine literature in English, this writer provides a list of poems and short stories that may be taken up and discussed in SDA schools

The Poems	Authors
"The Glass Chapel"	Ophelia Dimalanta
"Gabu"	Carlos Angeles
"Recognitions"	Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas
"Father"	Alfred Yuson
"Pedagogic"	Cirilo Bautista
"From the Rooftop"	Carlos Angeles
"Plow-time"	Ricaredo Demetillo
"My Neighbor"	Ricaredo Demetillo
"Death of a Leading Lady"	Myrna Pena-Reyes Sweet
"To My Mother"	Rene Estella Amper
"Nostalgia of Nurses"	Rene Estella Amper
"The Cocktail Party"	Pearl Gamboa-Doromal
"Point of View"	Cesar Ruiz Aquino
"For Iowa"	Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas
"Sons and Mothers"	Federico Licsi Espino, Jr.
"Poem for My Father"	Federico Licsi Espino, Jr.
"Third World Opera"	Simeon Dumdum, Jr.
"Communion"	Simeon Dumdum, Jr.
"Woman with Child"	Emmanuel Torres
"Montage"	Ophelia Dimalanta
"The Day My Next-Door Neighbor's Son Brought Home A Wife"	Anthony Tan

The Short Stories	
"Prodigal Season"	Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas
"All Over The World"	Vicente Rivera, Jr.
"The Common Theme"	Bienvenido Santos
"The Dead"	Amador Daguio
"Dear Miss Samonte"	Bienvenido Santos
"The Sunbird"	Edilberto K. Tiempo
"The Visit"	Kerima Polotan
"How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife"	Manuel Arguilla
"Graduation"	F. Sionil Jose
"The Visitation of the Gods"	Gilda Cordero-Fernando
"Faith, Love, Time, and Dr. Lazaro"	Gregorio Brillantes
"A Night in the Hills"	Paz Marquez-Benitez

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