

FORMALISMS REVISITED:
A READING OF ANGELA MANALANG GLORIA AND
EDITH TIEMPO

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1. Form and formlessness

In this essay I would like to speculate about the ways in which the distinctive poetic accomplishments of Angela Manalang Gloria (1907-95) and Edith Tiempo (1919-2011) might be said to arise from an elective affinity to form. I hope to place my notion of form within a general poetics, mindful that any such attempt must retain awareness of the rootedness of writing in the circumstances of specific lives and societies, whose literary cultures lend themselves to the abstraction of poetics only in the sense that “the theory of poetry is the theory of life” (Stevens 486), and a theory of life is never lived in abstraction. Their elective affinity for form differed in kind and degree, but each has come to represent a distinct stage in the growth of self-confidence and authority in Filipino writing. Each also presents formalism as the outcome of an interaction between individual temperament and literary culture, such that the relation between the individual and the tradition remains significant in several discursive fields: national, colonial, postcolonial, cosmopolitan, and global. For those who write poetry in the Philippines, such formalisms constitute a legacy whose long shadow impels poets less to emulation than to a search for roads not taken before.¹ For anyone interested in poetry, the significance of such formalisms is the scope revealed and the limits uncovered in the attempt by these two poets to reach *through* the local to the universal without giving up the quiddity without which poetry degenerates into verse and worse.

Any artifact can be said to have form in the contingent sense, as an aspect of the fact that it exists. A poem can also be said to have form in a purposive sense,

as an aspect of language-use subscribing to a specific idea of poetry, although access to the idea of such an intention is provided only by the poem itself, as the act of writing realizes and preserves this intention, in a transformed and residual rather than normative sense.² When a poem is heard or read, the zone of interaction constituted between poet and reader by the act of reading creates a third sense: form as an aspect of affect or percept. What the author intended, so far as intention can be said to inhere in the created object, is met by what the reader brings to, and takes from, the poem by way of a reading-experience. Northrop Frye once described reading as a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meanings. As a deliberately distorted account of the encounter between writer and reader, his parable has more going for it than the attempt associated with E.D. Hirsch, Jr. to distinguish *meaning* (that which an author puts into a text) from *significance* (that which a reader takes out of the text).³ In practice, it is never easy to establish if an idea of form derived by a reader from a text confirms and conforms to the idea of a recoverable intention, or constitutes an act of interpretive violence, vindicated only and contingently whenever two or more readers agree (more or less) on their notion of the poem's form. In brief, I shall treat the notion of form as hovering between interpretive recovery and interpretive (mis-)appropriation, mindful that a poem enables one to access intentions only in a subjective and interpreted sense. Rather than resolve the tension between form as an attribute ascribed to the poem and form as an account of the way a poem is perceived, I propose to put the tension to use by reading Manalang Gloria and Tiempo in such a way as to treat the idea of form as the *text* we construct from what the poem presents to us as *pretext*.

Form as pretext is that which separates existence from chaos and one entity from another.⁴ All creation myths speak of "life-giving" as "form-giving." Made forms, as distinguished from found forms (the clouds described to Hamlet by Polonius) are purposive in intent, but just as fragile. Schopenhauer's principle of individuality (and Nietzsche's Apollo) represents form as the illusion of temporary selfhood: a pretext of identity lacking self-conviction. Such ideas have relevance for the poets at hand. In Manalang Gloria, as I will argue, the addiction to strict forms is a function of containment that struggles to hold back a fear of formlessness. This fear is at its sharpest when she grapples with sexuality. The struggle brings up a sense of imminent rupture and dissolution. A manuscript poem quoted by Zapanta-Manlapaz in her biography of

Manalang Gloria, “The Score”, shows itself oddly suspended between making an accusation and denying having made an accusation: that the man in her life pins her to the dust, breaks her in body and spirit through the force of his “will” and his “endemoned lust.” Likewise, “Ten Years After” (1940, 1993: 102) speaks of the first experience of sexuality within marriage as “That ancient terrifying splendor, / That burned my bridal night.” In Tiempo’s case, the focus is not on sexuality but death, whose eventual arrival is anticipated calmly, with recognition that it leads to ultimate formlessness. Poems such as “Cherry-Heart” and “Outstripping Self” treat nature as “mutable and volatile”; and its forms are treated as no more than “a dream-substance” (Tiempo 238, 236). Whether through sexuality or death, the two poets gravitate towards the recognition that the will to form in nature is always frail, and little more than a momentary stay against the confusion of annihilation. The fear of formlessness provides a link between their otherwise dissimilar poetics.⁵

This fear gives to poetry an edge that is obsessively and defensively Apollonian. For example, Hart Crane, writing a letter to his father, underlined the need for form as emotional balance: “When I perceive one emotion overpowering to a fact, or a statement of reason, then the only manly, worthy, sensible thing to do, is build up the logical side, and attain balance, and in art—*formal expression*” (Tate 325). Crane gave up on life when the struggle for balance proved too much; Manalang Gloria gave up poetry when her struggle for balance at a time of crisis forced her into a dilemma between commitment to domestic responsibility and commitment to art. For the relatively brief period during which she did write (1925-40, and intermittently during 1946-50), form served as the primary element of containment when much else that was dealt within the poetry at the level of feeling threatened dissolution.

In “Cementerio del Norte” (Manalang Gloria 1936, 1993: 86), for instance, the finality of a friend’s death leaves the poet with almost nothing to say. A rhetorical question makes this recognition explicit: “What else is there to say?” And yet the poem does say something: it acknowledges the need to give form to feeling, even if both form and feeling are in *diminuendo*. What is named thus is not grief but the ghost of grief: “Thin cerements of rain around the forlorn ghosts of weeping.” In contrast, Tiempo takes death, including the prospect of her own eventual death, very matter-of-factly. Death is inevitable and in that sense, no surprise: “Since that is not unknown” (Tiempo 229), what matters, in “Between-Living,” is how we spend the interim, living and loving.

2. Form as material cause: sound

We can think of form as the principle of a poem's individuation through language, regardless of whether we treat the poem as a linguistic object realized from an intention or interpreted from a perception. The principle of individuation is "incurrigibly plural."⁶ I propose to address this plurality in terms used by Aristotle and by Heidegger to describe an artifact as the outcome of a material, formal, efficient, and final cause.⁷ In adopting their fourfold explanation, one can start with language as the material cause of a poem, which can be analyzed in terms of three constituent elements: sound, grammar, and figurative language.

At the level of the first element, form refers to the sound-qualities of words and the rhythm and cadence of phrases, sentences, and verse lines. The Russian Formalists articulated several recognitions about the relation of sounds to the idea of auditory form which retain their relevance: all language can be said to have some kind of rhythm, but such rhythms are "a by-product of syntax" in prose, whereas in poetry they can become a vital constituent of meaning, regardless of whether a poem uses meter or not, and regardless of the sense in which Roman Jakobson describes poetry as "organized violence committed on ordinary speech" (Erlich 213, 219).

At the level of sound, the contrast between Manalang Gloria and Tiempo highlights the different ways in which the representation of speech relates to and differs from the rhythms of song in poetry. Manalang Gloria writes in a metered language based on conventional Western prosody. For her time and place this can be regarded as a type of colonial dependency, the aspiring Filipina assimilating herself to the poetic traditions disseminated effectively during the first decades of American control over the educational apparatus in the Philippines. By the time Tiempo discovered her sense of vocation, the cultural dependency had had time to consolidate itself on both sides of the cultural divide. Derivativeness had become more selective, flexible, and adaptive; also, meter was no longer in vogue; free verse appealed. Tiempo worked out a personal logic of form to which she has remained consistent over a long career. Her most recent publication describes the formal choice she has made as "a variant procedure of free verse in which this writer, for one, currently finds room for both discipline (using rhymed lines or other traditional features) and spontaneity (mostly using lines expressed in prose-like statements" (2007: 11).

Tiempo prefers the rhythms of prose-like speech unmediated or lightly affected by the artifice of meter. Her poems do not seek the continuous tension between language as speech and language as song or metered verse that appeases a different need in Manalang Gloria, whose stanzas balance a simplified and literary version of ordinary speech with the pull of metrical pattern, as in “Addenda to History” (1935, 1993: 80):

Warm Cleopatra on the Nile
 Was swept away as mutely once
 By love that in its little while
 Meandered past all utterance—

In such poems, rhyme is cherished for how it brings closure to speech, but the grammar of the sentence moves the rhythm swiftly from one line and rhyme to the next, creating tension between metrical pauses and syntactic momentum.⁸ Away from her favorite four-line stanza, Manalang Gloria is distinctly uncomfortable. The few poems she tried out as free verse now sound lame: “Dreams” (1926, 1993: 30-33) and “Tabernacles” (1930, 1993: 65). Even meter and rhyme do not help when the verse line is allowed to get long, as in “Mayon Afternoon” (1937, 1993: 91). The difference made by meter, rhyme, and a short verse line are neatly illustrated by the enigmatic “Querida” (1940, 1993: 121):

The door is closed, the curtains drawn within.
 One room, a brilliant question mark of light ...
 Outside her gate an empty limousine.
 Waits in the brimming emptiness of night.

The poem has a dramatic economy reminiscent of Imagist doctrine, and the compact evocativeness of Browning’s “Meeting at Night” and “Parting at Morning”. The sardonic “Old Woman Walking on a City Street” (1950, 1993: 153, Manalang Gloria’s last published poem) provides another example of the firmness found by the poet in meter:

She had a way of walking through concupiscence
 And past the graces her fingers never twirled:
 Because her mind refused the heavy burden,
 Her broad feet shoved up the world.

The virtue and originality of such verse is partly in the neatness and partly in the surprise with which formal expectations are fulfilled while maintaining sharpness and precision of thought and feeling.

Tiempo is more varied in her choices: she can turn a sonnet when the occasion arises, but prefers a free verse that organizes itself in stanzas or arrives at the conjunctions of rhyme only when the theme calls for these, as in the final stanzas of “The Rhythm of Violets” and “Serpent from the Charmer’s Box”. In such poems, the reader’s progress through the poem is unprepared for rhyme when it occurs, or for the cadence quickening suddenly to a musical beat, when that happens. But the ghost of some meter hovers behind the arras, to be summoned or held in check as the occasion demands. The ability to use this freedom is a formal strength all the more notable for being used frugally. In “The Rhythm of Violets” (1977; 1993: 3), the poet underlines recognition that form is energy contained (Dionysus in the cage of Apollo, Soul trapped by Body):

And the world holds grace
By strict season and art,
For blood is a wanderer
And must have the heart,
Where rhythm is a prisoner
In the careful cage.

3. Form as material cause: grammar

The second way in which we can think of language as the formal cause of poetry is by attending to the work of syntax. In terms of diction, Manalang Gloria and Tiempo both adopt an international register that keeps a middle distance between the literary and the colloquial. What sets them apart is their fondness for the odd but apt choice of polysyllabic word, often abstract rather than concrete, and placed at crucial moments in the poem, like small rocks at strategic locations along the gravel paths of a Japanese garden: unexpected on first encounter, but apt on reflection. In Manalang Gloria, such words lend gravity of tone. She is particularly skillful at fitting trisyllabic words into an iambic rhythm. The final three lines of “Addenda to History” (1935, 1993: 80) dwell with deliberate relish on the last word of the poem:

I must not know a love too great
 Lest suddenly my tongue should cease,
 Like theirs, to be articulate.

Likewise, “The Tax Evader” (1940, 1993: 135) is dexterous in the interplay between meter, syntax, and polysyllabic diction:

Let others give to Caesar Caesar’s own:
 I have begrudged the dictatorial years
 The right usurious to tax me to the bone.

In Tiempo’s case, the diction is confident and never afraid of words encountered more often in dictionaries and phrasing that arises from the printed page rather than colloquial speech. The poetic line shares in the other harmony of prose, suggesting breadth of interest and scope of intellect. The syntax has the suppleness and muscularity of someone comfortable with the intricacy of thought struggling with itself towards weighty resolutions. Sometimes, the work of the intellect can lapse into ponderous affectation, mannerism, or self-parody: “To discommode the weeds, or rigged to rout/ The burrowed maggots with a spade” (1993: 55).

4. Form as material cause: figurative language

Figurative language is the third aspect of language as the material cause of a poem. Here, form as sound and form as diction or syntax combine with the expressive and rhetorical dimension of language to create significant patterns from the figurative resources of tropes and imagery. The creation of such patterns can intensify the effect and unify the structure of a poem independent of, or in collaboration with, form at the levels of sound and syntax. For instance, Manalang Gloria’s poem “1940 A.D.” is dominated and organized by the symbolic image of the apocalypse: the horrors of World War II and the awe occasioned by thought of Judgment Day are brought together in part tension and part mutual illumination:

[....]
 Voiceless from palavers of peace.
 We watch the nameless horror grow.
 Watch it till, glazed beyond release,
 Our eyes see neither friend nor foe.

[...]
 There is no bright Apocalypse
 In this despair whereon to cling,
 Save that, in durance vile, the lips
 Break into prayer for another spring.
 (1940, 1993: 94)

That which starts off as a possible analogy moves to a different recognition: that the man-made holocaust of war is a distortion of Divine judgment; that hope of renewal can continue to provide subsistence even amidst a world in ruins. The invocation of 'gore' and Homer contextualize present with past brutality. The need to place the present in stereoscopic perspective with the Greek past leaves behind a residual feeling that the war and its horror was a kind of stony exigency to which the poet could yield only through the intermediary of classical and biblical allusions. The poem also shows how a war suffered in the Philippines is rendered by a colonized intellect through imagery drawn from Western culture.

A comparable role for the organizing power of figurative language can be seen at work in some of Edith Tiempo's poems. The early sonnet, "Lament for the Littlest Fellow", is dominated not only by the tightly antithetical structure of octave and sestet but by the image of a face behind bars: the marmoset's face in the octave and that of the "sleeping you," to whom the poem is addressed, in the sestet. What holds the quizzical meaning of the poem together is the question of resemblance: does the image of the cage establish and sustain a meaningful (though enigmatic) analogy between animal and human; specifically, between the old man in the monkey's eyes, and the truant little monkey in the sleeping human face?

Many of Tiempo's mature poems are held together by the imagery of gardening as emblematic of a life lived close to the natural world. "Bonsai" (1972; 1993: 29) offers an allegory of life scaled down "to a cupped hand's size." When the poet writes of the capacity to perceive seashells as "broken pieces / from God's own bright teeth," the pleasure and surprise with which we greet the felicitous and fortuitous aspects of her analogy respond to the form-giving power of metonymy, even to the point of wondering about the might or firmness of a god who could have his teeth knocked out.

5. Form as formal cause: convention and genre

Let me turn next to the idea of a formal cause. In introducing causality as a four-fold debt owed by an artifact to its begetting, Heidegger uses the example of a silver vase: the metal provides its materiality; and the shape—as concept or idea—guides the making, and constitutes a formal cause, the enabling relation of individual creation to convention and tradition: what T.S. Eliot described as the dialectical tension between tradition and the individual talent. No poet writes in a vacuum. How Manalang Gloria came to write in English, using a certain concept of form at the level of sound and rhythm, a certain concept of diction and syntax, and a certain range of images and figures, all bespeak assimilation of, and relation to, a tradition.⁹ Significant women poets published in America for the first time in book form during the period of Manalang Gloria's early years include Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale and several others, who made the short lyric form the staple of their verse, and practiced a formalism that shares a family-resemblance with the lapidary manner cultivated by Manalang Gloria. A quick juxtaposition will illustrate the basic affinity in style and lyric genre. Here is a cinquain from Manalang Gloria, "The Closed Heart" (1927, 1993: 45):

Call not ...
 Sharp brambles cast
 Deep shadows on the stone door
 Of my hall ... O strange one, why linger
 Still there?

And here is one from her likely model, Adelaide Crapsey, "The Warning":

Just now,
 Out of the strange
 Still dusk ... as strange, as still ...
 A white moth flew ... Why am I grown
 So cold?

Next, here is a stanza of Manalang Gloria's "The Moral Is" (1938, 1993: 93):

Who, between sin and whitened virtue,
 Choose to play the Jezebel,
 Knowing that heaven is twice heaven
 Only to those who once knew hell.

And here is a stanza from Elinor Wylie's "The Eagle and the Mole":

The huddled warmth of crowds
 Begets and fosters hate;
 He keeps, above the clouds,
 His cliff inviolate.

And here is one from Manalang Gloria's "Beatitude" (1940, 1993: 100):

I have never asked of Life
 More than it gave me,
 More than my need of crystal days
 Cut from eternity.

And finally, here is Sarah Teasdale's short poem "It Is Not a Word":

It is not a word spoken,
 Few words are said;
 Nor even a look of the eyes
 Nor a bend of the head,

 But only a hush of the heart
 That has too much to keep,
 Only memories waking
 That sleep so light a sleep.

In each of these poets, neatness of meter and phrasing combines with a terse and tough manner, as apt vehicles for feminine perceptions accrued through pain and hurt. They are all presented in polished form, as something personal that aspires to generality, the lyric poem as an instance of the concrete universal.¹⁰

If Manalang Gloria wrote within a carefully cultivated mode prevalent among her American models and contemporaries, in contrast, Tiempo moved swiftly from assimilating New Critical doctrines and poetic models to an independent style that mediates between lyric, anecdote, and fable. It is no accident that the kind of density and intellectualism we encounter in Tiempo is close to the modernist poets celebrated by Cleanth Brooks in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939). Of these poets' work, Brooks remarks that "the play of the intellect is not necessarily hostile to depth of emotion" (13). When Edith and Edilberto introduce a selection of Filipino writing in 1953, the

faults Edith picks out among prose writers are a “false conception of unity; insensitivity to conflict; confusion in symbolic equivalence”; while talking of the poetry, Edilberto complains of inexpert execution and “lack of a sense of form”: “There are uncomfortably too many inheritors of Mrs Subido’s poetic manner in this country” (xxi, xxiii).

It is no accident that the kind of density and intellectualism we encounter in Edith Tiempo is close to the heroes of the modern celebrated by Brooks. “Wit” and “seriousness” linked the Metaphysical to the Modern poets, and both models are never too far behind Tiempo’s way of conducting herself through a poem. She also upholds a recognition, which Brooks identifies as typical of the modern, “that things are not poetic per se, that nothing can be said to be intrinsically unpoetic” (11). The attitude he praised is also the attitude that Tiempo brings to her poems: “The ability to be tender and, at the same time, alert and aware intellectually is a complex attitude, a mature attitude ... Moreover, the tenderness is achieved, not in spite of the wit, but through it” (23).

6. Form as efficient cause: the poem as the making

What brings the material and formal causes together in unique interaction is the act of making: the making as the efficient cause of form. In the efficient cause, form is a relation between the maker and the made. It is also a relation between the poet making and the reader reading. The poet is present in the poem as the principle of selection and arrangement of materials and genre.¹¹ This principle constitutes what is unique and specific to the poem. To understand the role of the efficient cause in the poem, we ask ourselves: who and what speaks in and through the poem? What is the role of experience (sensations, objects, and persons) in the poem? What is the imagined situation, scene, or predicament that the reader encounters? What do we infer of the dominant idea, mood, emotion, feeling or desire or concern that governs the making? Let us consider Manalang Gloria’s sonnet “Soledad” (1935, 1993: 73):

It was a sacrilege, the neighbors cried,
The way she shattered every mullioned pane
To let a firebrand in. They tried in vain
To understand how one so carved from pride
And glassed in dream could have so flung aside

Her graven days, or why she dared profane
 The bread and wine of life for one insane
 Moment with him. The scandal never died.

But no one guessed that loveliness would claim
 Her soul's cathedral burned by his desires,
 Or that he left her aureoled in flame . . .
 And seeing nothing but her blackened spires,
 The town condemned this girl who loved too well
 And found her heaven in the depths of hell.

The poem proffers the unnamed “she” to the reader by way of subversive exemplum: here but for the grace of prudery go you and I! We are urged to sympathize with the individual who takes an enormous risk, which T.S. Eliot evoked memorably as “the awful daring of a moment’s surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract.” That this risk might be viewed as a sacrilege is acknowledged and then bracketed off by the poem: we are invited to avoid becoming one of those scandalized neighbors who reject the risk, for then we would have missed the point. And the point is that she found heaven in hell.

The Petrarchan octave is modified by the sestet to give us the resounding couplet of the English or Shakespearean sonnet. The shock of a conservative reaction, neatly presented but subtly undermined within the octave, prepares the way for empathy with why someone might fling aside the glass and bread and wine of graven days and mullioned enclosures for a conflagration of desire that blackens yet aureoles. Every resource of diction, syntax, sound, cadence, and imagery drives the making towards an insight into what drove the girl to her choice of loving not wisely but well.

We recollect that Keats wrote in a letter that “We hate poetry that has a palpable design on us”¹² but the sentiment needs qualification if it is not to appear somewhat disingenuous, because—I’d like to argue—every poem *does* nurse a design upon us. We meet the poet in the form of a palpable intentionality that is meant to make us see, hear, feel, think, and know something in a particular way. We cannot be sure that how we end up feeling and thinking is what the poet intended. But we do recognize that it is the poet-in-the-poem as its efficient cause who makes us name that design for ourselves as the import of the poem: the form of what we think was expressed and communicated to us.¹³

7. Form as final cause: poetry and knowledge

Thus we come to the fourth sense in which a poem has form. This sense responds to the question, *why does a poem come into existence?* Why a poem came into being is its reason for existence, form as *telos* or final cause. There are two perspectives that I find particularly insightful here: the first (adapted from Novalis by Walter Benjamin) describes a poem as “the task, corresponding to the idea of the solution as which the poem exists”¹⁴—that is, as the form of an implicit necessity for the poem to exist; the second (from John Crowe Ransom) speaks of a poem as “the kind of knowledge by which we must know what we have arranged that we shall not know otherwise” (x). Benjamin proposes the idea that life or experience poses a question, which elicits the poem as its necessitous response, answer, or solution. Ransom proposes an idea of the poem as an arrangement of meanings, which provides a vital form of understanding. The two approaches agree that the final cause is a form of knowing; the poem as the form taken by a specific and unique insight into experience.

A poet’s adherence to form is an interaction between temperament and influence or predilection and acculturation. It can also be described as a merger of choice with need. In Manalang Gloria, this knowing is a matter of precise phrasing and firm containment. Her formalism corresponds to a need, which is also a form of self-recognition: freedom as a conditional mode of existence found in and through constraint. Her paradox is that the ultimate freedom accessed by poetry leads her from containment to an ultimate and binding abandonment of writing. Mallarmé sometimes contemplated the idea of a book comprising nothing but blank pages. Manalang Gloria made of the latter part of her life a book filled with busy blank pages. The freedom and the constraint became one.

For Tiempo, understanding is a matter of the knowledge of forms, and a matter of accepting where all forms arise from: nature. Formalism, in her case, is less a matter of writing to a given form than a matter of reflecting on form as primal to nature—whether human, animal, vegetal, or inanimate. The overall coherence of her views is strikingly self-aware: form is central to the creative aspect of nature, cognitive acts that constitute primary perception respond and correspond to these forms; poets name them; in reading, we recover what the poet names. The truth of poetry is the intuitive grasp with which the poet can capture in the naming an aspect of form that remains true as language,

even when the forms of nature on which it is based, have metamorphosed. The frequency and consistency with which these views are given expression during the 1970s provides one of the unifying motifs to *The Charmer's Box* (1993).¹⁵

The gestalt that accumulates through *The Charmer's Box* shows two correlations between idea and feeling: first, creativity in nature (and in art, which can do no better than learn from nature) begins with an input of effort whose residue survives as the grief and pain that attend the act of making, the process through which the inert comes alive in movement and stir; second, that the containment necessary to hold energy in place produces both rage at motion held in check, and awe at the intimation of divinity in the interactions between energy and matter that produce the forms of nature. The formalism of nature uses matter, energy, and shape as their elemental vocabulary; grief and anger attend their interactions, while awe and gratitude are enjoined upon readers as the feelings that should attend upon the recovery of those forms by poetry.

8. Form and metonymy: Edith Tiempo

Tiempo's interest in form and shape leads her to an instructive and striking use of metonymies, a strategy she names "affirmation by synecdoche" in "To an old Aunt" (1977, 1993: 39).¹⁶ Bearing in mind the general idea that metonymy-synecdoche are figures of contiguity, in which "one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal, or conceptual relation," we can say that the motif of form as containment leads to the metonymy of the container as token of value. In Tiempo, such containers take specific shapes: they are cages, boxes, shells, and other such familiar objects which partake of one basic feature, they bespeak (and speak for), and they hold (and hold in, hold back, and simply hold) that which is not to be let out, or left, in the open. The image of the face as a "living cage" had occurred in her writing as early as the sonnet: "Lament for the Littlest Fellow". Implicitly, concealment is the unspoken part of containment. The metonymy of a cage or a box as container denies exposure; promotes enclosure. "Bonsai" (1972, 1993: 29) offers what we might regard as the definitive embodiment of this set of drives and motives. The speaker of the poem begins by acknowledging that she handles loved objects with the habit of folding them over and then tucking them away in receptacles such as a box, a slit on a post, or a shoe. The act of putting things this way is described as the "heart's control." The opposite of enclosure is disclosure: a more difficult and rare feat, accomplished in metonymy, when a

cupped hand can hold up fragrance to the air, as in “Guru Puja: The Offering” (1987, 1993: 64).

If containment is one aspect of metonymy, a more extrovert aspect is presented as a type of scaling down. The image of seashells—“broken pieces / From God’s own bright teeth”—is a perfect example of this aspect of her gift for metonymy. What the image accomplishes, like the craft of bonsai, is to promote miniaturization to the level of a godsend: versions of the macro in micro format exemplify the positive principle underlying containment: manageableness. A reduction in size makes an entity easier to manage, cherish, share, and give as shaped object and cognitive entity. The threat latent to size is reduced; the need for concealment abandoned or resolved, and the scope for comprehension and control increased. Shaping as scaling down and tucking away are means to an end, and the end they serve is control, specifically, control over the cherishing.

Her use of metonymy as a container and a scaling down is complemented by its role as a token of unity. To the idea of unity Tiempo lends two connotations, one that is aesthetic, and another that is existential. The first kind is matter of visual perception; when we are disposed to think of mind and eye as mere “traps for light,” it makes perfect sense to think and feel that “Flowers, creepers, majestic stems / Fulfill the vase” (‘Guru Puja: The Offering’, 1993: 63), as if plant life achieved fulfillment only when reposing in a vase. A more purposive and existential notion of unity is invoked in “Design” (n.d., 1993: 30), where steel is treated as a token of “trapped lightning,” form as the container for energy, but one that is “perilous” because it represents only that which is achieved in the world of technology. Its natural counterpart in the human world is the body: the poet’s son is enjoined to cherish the pact made by god with the human in grit, gut, and blood as the gift of grace and benediction. A pre-industrial sense of self as a shape articulated through natural flesh and bone is held up as both more fragile and more precious than the forms and shapes welded by industrial man. The celebration of the human body as the ultimate natural container is topped by an even more remarkable celebration.

In “Speck of Rain Roaring” (1974, 1993: 45), the metonymy of the human as a form of achieved selfhood is celebrated when it shows a capacity for supreme composure and self-possession even in the direst of circumstances. To sustain composure under stress is the ultimate embodiment of unity, of a balance between parts and the whole they constitute, and also between a person and

her environment. At the moment of greatest loss and suffering, when this self-possession does not gutter, it retains the ultimate power, “the capacity to contain herself.” Nothing could underline more firmly the enormous importance attached by Tiempo to the idea of forms of composure and composition as figures of control and containment. A later poem on Emily Dickinson, “Emily on East Bloomington Street” (1988, 1993: 52-3), is unsparing in its dual recognition, that the formalism of art, its capacity to capture and hold on to aspects of life that wither and die in the world of mortality, is like a “little Lie,” a “witchery to bind and spell / Life without breath but permanent.” We are still on the street where Keats lived, and Emily, but glad, regardless, to have form ratified and mortified by the company we keep, distinguished as much for the pain it bears as for how it contains the pain.

Notes

1. Contemporary misgivings concerning formalist practices for a Filipino context are exemplified in J. Neil Garcia (2007: 2 and *passim*).

2. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., “Genesis: An Argument Resumed” (1976: 36): “the closest one could ever hope to get to the artist’s intending or meaning mind, outside his work, would be still short of his effective intention or operative mind as it appears in the work itself and can be read from the work.”

3. Cf. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (1984).

4. Susan Stewart begins *Poetry and the Fate of Senses* (2002) with the assertion that “the cultural, or form-giving, work of poetry is to counter the oblivion of darkness” (1-2). Julia Kristeva, in 1974, wrote of “the eternal function” of poetic language: “to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through, and threatens it” (81); and remarked that the poetics of Joyce and Bataille signified “a refusal of poetry as a flight into madness and a struggle against poetry as a fetishism” (82).

5. Cf. Roman Jakobson, “The Dominant” (1935/1971): “the *dominant* ... was one of the most crucial, elaborated, and productive concepts in Russian Formalist theory. The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure” (1981: 751).

6. The phrase is borrowed from Louis MacNeice’s poem “Snow”, in which snowflakes, like the world of which they are part, are celebrated for being “incorrigibly plural.”

7. Aristotle, *Physics* II, 3; also, *Metaphysics*, A. 3ff, D, 2. Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” ([1954], 1977: 313-14).

8. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. (1972) notes that any combination of the four properties of syllables (combined with the rhythmic value of pauses and silences) provides the basis for the versification of a given language or prosodic tradition: counting syllables, duration, stress, and pitch. The Western classical traditions use the first two features, English prosody since the Renaissance uses the first and third.

9. In Manalang Gloria's case, Zapanta-Manlapaz (11-12, 17-8) identifies Sister Withburga (in school), C. V. Wickers and George Pope Shannon (in university) as teachers and advisers. The canon reflected in contemporary America can be sampled from anthologies such as E. C. Stedman's *An American Anthology* (1900), Harriet Monroe's *The New Poetry* (1917), and Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry* (1919). In the case of Tiempo, the interview by Allegre and Fernandez (1987) indicates the early guidance of Felix Umaging Brawner (high school), the influence of Paul Engle's Iowa writing workshops (1947), his advice that Edith should read Cleanth Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), and her own many subsequent articulations of the challenges and opportunities for poets writing in English from the Philippines.

10. The concrete universal maybe described, adapting Wimsatt, as the recognition that a poem can be "in some peculiar sense a very individual thing or a very universal thing" (1954: 69), *and both at once*.

11. In *The Literary Work of Art* (1931/1973) and *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1936/1973), Roman Ingarden developed a system of explanation from which we can borrow the notions of "schematized aspects" and "represented entities" to refer to what the reader interprets from the making as the scope of the fictive reference made by an artifact to the world of reality shared between author and reader. The advantage of the system of explanation used by Ingarden, and developed further by Wolfgang Iser in *The Implied Reader* (1972) and *The Act of Reading* (1976) is that it provides room for recognizing that the evocative/referential dimension of a literary text has determinate and indeterminate aspects, and readers might "fill" the latter for themselves as part of the subjective dimension of interpretation.

12. "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us—and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze with itself, but with its subject." Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (February 3, 1818).

13. Cf. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941/1957: 75-6): "The general approach to the poem might be called 'pragmatic' in this sense: It assumes a poem's structure is to be described most accurately by thinking always of the poem's function. It assumes that the poem is designed to 'do something' for the poet and his readers, and that we can make the most relevant observations about its design by considering the poem as the embodiment of this act. In the poet, we might say, the poeticizing existed as a physiological function. The poem is its corresponding anatomic

structure. And the reader, in participating in the poem, breathes into this anatomic structure a new physiological vitality that resembles, though with a difference, the act of its maker, the resemblance being in the overlap between writer's and reader's situation, the difference being in the fact that these two situations are far from identical."

14. Benjamin, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin" (1914/1996: 19). Cf. "For like every work of art this novel is based on an idea, or as Novalis put it, 'It has an a priori ideal, an implicit necessity to exist'" (1921/1996: 79, also 158).

15. The dates of first publication attached to poems by Edith Tiempo are based on the bibliography in *The Edith Tiempo Reader* (174-85).

16. Synecdoche is generally (but not always) treated as a subset of Metonymy. *The Princeton Encyclopedia*: Synecdoche: part for whole; species for genus; individual for group or vice-versa; also, material for object; quality for its possessor. Metonymy: container for thing contained; agent for act, product or object; cause for effect; time or place for their characteristics or products; associated object for its possessor.

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