

Writing as Journey

The Japanese haiku and the poetry of William Carlos Williams, Merlinda Bobis and Danton Remoto were my early models of what poetry should be – spare, elegant, accessible. Early on, I had an understanding that good poetry doesn't have to be ponderous and obscure.

And then, there was Pablo Neruda. His sensuousness showed me another side of poetry. There's a beautiful swagger in his metaphors, an unpredictable spontaneity perhaps typical of Latin American writers, that awakened in me a recklessness in expression, an expansion of my sense of what could be made possible in language.

Among Filipino writers today – Marjorie Evasco, Merlie Alunan, J Neil Garcia, Conchitina Cruz to name a few – the appeal resides not only in their sharp language and startling resonances but also in the sound they make. Their poems, just like most poems today, are not about rhymes or predetermined beats. Rather they are about an easy flow of words that matches thought movements and breath patterns, further reinforcing sense. At times, when a poem I'm working on gets unwieldy in parts, I get into the habit of re-reading these poets before I plunge back into writing, then reading my poem again and again until it feels right to the bone.

I lift the paragraph above from an earlier essay on my own writing. This is to show that writing – whether creative or academic – is a journey and journey most of the time means a lifetime.

The distance of the journey from beginning to end is indeterminate. The endpoint is not fixed, it moves just a bit farther away every time the writer makes some progress. Like a mirage of sparkling lake to a weary traveler trudging across an endless expanse of desert.

This is my way of saying that the endpoint, in principle, is perfection -- or at least the idea of it. And perfection is almost always unattainable. Writing as a tireless hankering for that perfection becomes a process of self-mastery, an act of self-denial and love. Writing is thus necessarily rewriting.

A writer's work then could be a reflection of the varying points in the journey. It happens that words fall on the page like raindrops. These words I call *inevitable*. They have been latently building up, incessantly rewriting themselves, and hovering in the writer's mental horizon, so that all the writer has to do when the time comes is pluck them from the clouds and commit them to the page. Thus, we say the work is inspired, the divine breath flowing through the writer's being.

But most of the time, a poem or a story or an idea is **not** (emphasis on not) inevitable. It is a fugitive, a shapelessness the writer is bent on arresting time after time, until the shape is made visible through language. What this entails of course is tons of experience and hard work (which I'm

afraid is easily misinterpreted by this generation as the numbing length of time spent on social media and google).

By hard work, we mean honest-to-goodness hard work:

Expansive and thoughtful reading

Steadfast aspiration towards language mastery
(idiom, collocation of words, and their rhythmic qualities)

Discipline and rigor in research

Staying power --- how deeply connected the initiate is to the call of words.

To many of our students, this sense of responsibility grows in time as they are beginning to heed the call of language. Most of the time the journey is understandably unsteady and cautious. Like reeds clinging precariously on the edge of a riverbank. Not sure whether to let go and be carried in the eddying possibility of failure or to cling deep into the soil, seeking gradual stability and confidence in the constant act of writing.

In this issue we are happy to feature the works of our very own English majors (from recent and current school years) who, it might be said, are at various points in their writing journey:

Jesrel Kate Maquiling
Laleanne G Batao
Keziah Mae G Escabarte
Farrah Florenda Uy
Charm Mae Onineza
Tirmidy Wahab Angni
Quenee Lavern G Pongcol

We also acknowledge with gratitude the contribution in the literary study section of **Tyron Keith Maru V. Sabal**, teacher-writer from the Philosophy Department. Tyron, an XU alumnus, writes on the Persian poet Rumi from the standpoint of philosophy and the spirituality quality of love.

All in all, the works here are a testament to the latent energies and evolving qualities of budding writers and researchers, whose full growth we could only wish to witness with pride in the future ahead.