

And Frogs Can Sing

by Ma. Elena L. Paulma

Let us say that you wake up one weekday morning to find your car almost kissing the ground, its right front wheel decidedly flat. And you happen to live in the farthest street of the farthest subdivision of the farthest community. Hence, you must walk to the “nearest” terminal, a good 20-minute-walk from where you are. So for the first time since you moved into your hermit house, you take a walk in the morning, and discover all that you have been missing: the wet green of freshly showered trees glinting in the early sun, the dance of cogon grass gracefully bowing in the breeze, and all around the singular song of bullfrogs humming like a thousand drums and the beat of gongs. And all the time you are writing this in your mind, thinking how lucky you are to have a flat tire on a morning such as this.

In your writer’s heart is inscribed the word “paradox”. You find joy and sadness at losing and finding, endings and beginnings. You feel the urge to write, and the fear of writing. You seek to write about the world of realities which can never be captured in your words. You engage in writing which is both an art and a craft.

The writer’s passion that fires the act of writing makes it an art. The controlled workings of the mind that tames this passion makes it a craft. Writing is an art because it is a very personal thing, close to the heart and the movements of the spirit. What makes it a craft is when the artist seeks to sharpen his skills so that these urgings of the heart may be given their best form, in this case, the written form. It is an art because that which moves the writer to wake up in the middle of the night, get up, pick up a pen and start writing reinvents the world and people in words. The writer’s engagement with the world, with people, and with words is an act of “reading” which becomes a twin to the act of writing. Writing is a craft when the writer consciously creates a work containing language that draws images of setting, story and character with a distinct voice. Of course, there are no hard and fast rules about writing. If anything, creative writing thrives on the breaking of rules, the exploration of untrodden paths.

Janet Burroway speaks of how a writer lives in the world. First of all, a writer is constantly aware of and very much alive to all that is happening, always listening to people, and not just to their words. A writer is very curious, always asking questions about how things work and why. A writer engages with the world in a rather different way because s/he creates something new out of what is, and may go against what should be. Finally, a writer walks around with a sense of wonder, the inner eye seeing everything as always new.

Writing is a way of life, a way of looking at the world. At the moment, your world is this city of bridges with its river, its streets tight with vehicles and people strolling as if each corner was their own living room, the food stalls their personal kitchen counters. If you happen to pass by this subdivision in Lumbia, you will notice a pink dog that sits on its haunches in front of the huge gate. Most of its hair has fallen off, the pink skin on its emaciated form spotted with pus-covered scratches. Next to the grand gate, it looks a sight. But your writer's mind will want to know why it keeps its faithful watch in the same place every day. Somehow, you will find the words. For a writer, pink dogs are beautiful and frogs can sing.