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Writing as an Adventure

CYMBELINE REFALDA-VILLAMIN

I am inviting all women into the adventure of feminist writing. Let us go wild, indulge in excess, write with white ink (breast milk) and red ink (menstrual blood), so that our works will become nurturing, cleansing, and cathartic.

According to French philosopher Helene Cixous, feminine pleasure has long been denied women. To bring about change, women must break the long historical silence. They must write themselves, write about their bodies, their desires.

Cixous (who wrote *The Laugh of the Medusa*) is one of the two French minds that empowered me recently. The other is postmodernist writer Raymond Federman (author of *Loose Shoes*, *My Body in Nine Parts*, "Interview with Godot," etc.). To Federman, creativity is writing as an adventure rather than the writing of an adventure.

Cixous's *Medusa* takes on the Greek myth woman character as metaphor for feminist writing to dramatize the long absence of women's voice in history, as suppressed by masculine economy and politics. Medusa's snakes on her head are multiple penises that men are scared of; the penis is a reproductive and creative force. Whenever men see a woman, they look at her as either a Medusa or one without penis but with a black hole where men who entered never came back. "We are women, we are black and beautiful." One has to read more about Cixous to appreciate how her thoughts can empower women.

Feminism and Postmodernism

Postmodernism can be liberating to many whose creativity is encumbered by forms and genres. With postmodernism, we can be fragmen-

tary, random, mix poetic prose and prosaic poetry in a single work, engage in calibrated digressions and blissful stream-of-consciousness.

We need not be constrained or ashamed of drawing from our inner resources. Because we do not write about our lives but how we perceive and give meaning to life based on our experiences. No, we do not write about our lovers and friends but relationships—purposes and dead ends, bliss and anguish, mediocrity as well as the sense of absolute holiness however ephemeral.

Writing is the most self-actualizing of the arts. In it we fulfill our basic needs and desires (read A. H. Maslow) and reach a kind of *jouissance* (read Cixous). This beautiful French word is so rich in meaning. It is more than joy, nirvana, sexual happiness, spiritual high. It is all at the same time sexual, psychological, economic, and political; at the same moment, it is also ephemeral and ethereal.

When women write about themselves, their innermost thoughts, secret feelings, impressions, they make imprints on their daughters and granddaughters' lives in the future. We pass onto the next generations a legacy of wisdom that contributes to their attainment of a higher and a higher level of self-knowledge and discovery. We owe them the recording and preserving of our insights into the complexities of reality and self. Our present will soon be past, a roadmap to half of humanity's destiny and eventually to entire humanity's. They do need to know about how we lived, how we made love with our bodies and our minds—for their emotional quotient and survival with a lesser and a lesser degree of anguish.

The act of writing is like the act of praying is like the act of making love. You need a room with locked doors, silence, and scented candles perhaps. Have a pen and a notebook, or use your laptop if you want. Just write anything that you feel and think. Date it, time it. With one page a day, you have 365 pages in a year and that is already a book!

Write as lover, beloved, wife, mother, sister, friend. Write about household chores, career, fun moments, griefs, joys, betrayals, infidelities, boredom, longing, moments of doubt, dark nights of the soul, rainbow and sunshine after the rain, memories of lost love, starting over, flying high, being broken, moments of calm and peace when you do feel the mystical presence of the one great poet-lover you can ever have—God.

Obscene or just ahead of its time?

Estrella Alfon wrote a short story in 1955, "A Fairy Tale in the City," for which she was charged in court with obscenity, a traumatic experience from which it was said she never recovered. Let me tell you a secret. I have completed a short novel, about 130 pages, 32,000 words, *My Tokyo Memoir*, detailing an erotic cyber relationship. I am scared to publish it because people might label it pornographic. Of course, no publisher is interested, but I can self-publish in digital format if I want to yet I don't. Maybe after some fifty years from now, readers, specially Filipino readers, will no longer be shocked by it, as contemporary Filipinos do not find Ms. Alfon's story obscene at all.

In this novel, I used the email as a literary technique to develop plot and characters. I went beyond borders, pushed boundaries. I mixed epistles and narratives with poetry.

May I share the poetry (less shocking) part. The world's first novel, written by a woman in eleventh-century Japan, *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, has poems as parts of the narrative texts. The earliest novel is very postmodernist.

Leaving Shibuya-ku and other Poems

1.

Love at Break of Dawn

I whisper your name and touch your face
 Run my fingers through your hair
 I slither and insinuate
 Into your private territory
 Will you to quiver and throb.
 Slowly you open your eyes and utter a moan
 Honey what time is it?
 It's youthful morning and our future rises
 As the dawn stars break away
 I bring you back to life.
 You seek me and find me an ember
 You fire with such passionate kiss
 An ocean of desire opens which you fathom and quench
 Flooding your load of eternity fragments

And filling this soul to the brim.
 How can I ever face each break of dawn
 Without you?

2.

Softly, Softly at Dawn's Breaking (His Answer)

Softly, softly at dawn's breaking
 I feel you upon my ear
 Your sweet voice whispering my name
 Warm hand stroking my back wet with sweat,
 Snaking to my front and down,
 And ah! My manhood wakes up from slumber.
 I heave and groan,
 Your prickly black forest against my rear
 As you find the excitement in my groin.
 I turn and meet the beloved lips,
 Our tongues firing each other,
 As I enter wetly
 And begin our long accustomed rhythm.
 This heavenly waking ritual is bliss
 When you receive my spurting gift.
 Though your gift is so much the greater—
 To be there everyday
 And renew the life in me.

3.

Like a Razor

I have burning lips
 And a hot heart.
 I need you every moment
 Of every day.
 Virtual hugs and kisses
 Are not enough.
 Extend and expand the moments
 Of our encounter.
 I am yielding to my hunger for you,
 I want to eat of your flesh
 And drink from the chalice of your manhood.

If you are within touching distance
I would go straight for your heart
On your bed of worship.
I am wounded by my understanding of love.
So what
If love is like a razor
That leaves me to bleed?
Will bleed willingly
Rather than laugh
But not all of my laughter
And weep
But not all of my tears.

4.

Leaving Shibuya-ku

Is this the end of our love?
I am letting go but first you must fulfill
your promise to bring me to Ladakh, Kashmir
and present me to the Supreme Being
hoping He will give me back to you
to take care of in mind, body, and soul;
dream our best dreams together
until He finally claims us both.
I am letting go but first you must take me
one day after work, to sit in silence
with you at the garden
in the heart of Tokyo near the shrine;
drink in the tranquility and afterwards
go home, undress without words, make love
without desperation.
Then while you sleep, dreaming of Himalaya
I will gently leave Shibuya-ku
before the break of dawn, my love.

5.

The Love Junkie

Oh my god I am a love junkie
Always seeking a dopamine high

To feel intoxicated with life
I love hate love my cyber honey
I squeeze him dry until I cry
He loves me loves me not
Goes online when I'm not
Sorry I can't take care of him
And it's unfair of me
To keep saying I love him forever when
He knew and I do too that
Such was true but has now become a lie
He can't love me for he hardly knew me
It takes a lifetime to love and
So I give up my sweet, sweet honey
And I'll cease to be a love junkie
Though it's suicide giving up my cyber honey
And the heavenly taste of his plum sake.

6.

Sharifa and Sonya*

Billowing
Fluttering
Winding
Engulfed in burka
As you negotiate
The bustling market
Struggling to purchase
FREEDOM
From your prison
Of the soul and spirit
While I agonize
Over estrus and angst
You have learned
To deny your
Feelings and emotions
Alternately living

**The Bookseller of Kabul* (2004), by Asne Seierstad, translated by Ingrid Christophersen.

As sisters and as rivals
For the love of one man
Himself a prisoner
Of war-torn past and
Uncertain future
Forgive me
My suffering sisters. . . .

A lonely adventure

I have long been away from the university and creative writing workshops. Honestly I'm afraid that what I call writings fall short of my mentors' (of long ago) standard. But from this part of the planet, I continue to pursue my private passion amid the anxieties of parenting, responding to the material needs of family, and keeping my self-esteem while immersed yet isolated from bureaucratic politics. My art has not failed me. Literature continues to be my guiding light in exploring the labyrinth of reality and self. "Writing as an Adventure"—this is my contribution. It may be gross and unpolished but it's mine and I offer it with all humility to anyone who may benefit from it.