To Write

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1. Any written work is text. "Text" is from Latin *texere, textus*, "to weave." So then, to write is to weave language *anew*, and all we read and unravel is a word-weave, a text-tale.

The text is not so much *written in* a historical language, like English or Tagalog, as *wrought from* language. For the writer, the language is *not* a given. In every instance of writing, language is re-woven, reinvented, because the writer must find his own path through the wilderness of language. Our thoughts and feelings without our words are like brambles – the underbrush of the human psyche, dream and intuition.

To write is to breathe life into language. For the words of any language are single and bereft in the dead sea of the language's dictionary. No meaningfulness arises from there, from that dead sea, because the meanings of words do not arise from themselves, but from lives lived. The words come to life only when writer or reader light them up with their imagination – then, and only then, are the words brought into interplay in some order by which a thought or feeling, a human experience, is endowed with a definite form. From there – that form made up wholly of elected words, that configuration of a human experience constructed with words – a meaningfulness arises, from reader to reader, from critic to critic, each one drawing imaginatively from his/her experience of the world in his/her own community of a shared ideology.

2. To speak, to write: one needs to be aware of the difference between communication and expression.

When one speaks, language isn't the only medium of communication – there is body language, gestures, facial expression, tone of voice, the very occasion for speaking. Communication implies community, communion: that is, one shares in, and draws from, his community's outlook or world view, values and beliefs, biases and prejudices.

When one writes, language assumes a different character, a different life; it becomes the sole medium. It becomes a singularity of expression – more than communication, the expression is one's way with language, an individual style. Style, says the philosopher Albert Camus, is "the simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind that gives reality its form." Such expression has a certain power to move and persuade by which even a community's outlook, values, and prejudices might be subverted, changed or transformed.

Singularity of expression, a distinctive style – for to write is to translate in its etymological sense: from Latin *transferre, translatus*, "to convey or ferry across." To write is to ferry across the multitudinous sea of words and their nuances one's own soul's freight without hurt or injury to its import and aim.

It is no accident that language is also called tongue. The tongue is a sense organ that offers the delicatest and most intimate sense of reality; it implies then that the sensitive reader savors the words of the text and draws delight from it. *De gustibus non disputandum*: in matters of taste, dispute is disreputable.

3. The subject of all writing is a human experience: when it is written, it is the singular moment, or the singular course of an event, as lived *as imagined*. What is most real is what is most imagined.

The moment is first lived, and then imagined, before it is written; or, if it is purely imagined, it is as if it had been lived. In every case, one draws from one's experience, whether the experience is in one's own living or, as when has been moved by a novel or a poem, in one's own life of imagination.

What is a human experience? – the very word, "experience," tells us from its Greek and Latin etymology – in Greek, *enpeiran,* from which the English word "empirical" comes; in Latin, *experiri*, from which the English word "experiment" is derived. Both Greek and Latin mean, 1st, "to try or

attempt"; 2nd, "to fare, go on a journey"; 3rnd, "to undergo," to suffer, to endure; and 4th, "to pass through," that is, to meet with chance and danger where nothing is certain. That is the rich meaningfulness of that one word, "experience."

A thought or a feeling is already a human experience. A mood or state of mind, a stance or attitude is a human experience. The only reality we shall ever know is a human reality: only our individual perceptions of what we call "our world." A cat's perception of its own world is different from ours; it inhabits a different world. This is why Carl Jung could say (poignantly, because we are mortal), "the individual is the only reality": such the compass and limit of human experience.

And it is only with the words of a language that we grasp our human reality. Which is why I say that the meanings of our words come from lives lived, from a people's history and culture. Which is why I also say, the poem is to live, not just to read. To write is to get real.

4. As to literary criticism, its original meaning is instructive. The word "criticism" comes from Greek *krinein*, "to divide or discriminate, and to judge," from which the English words, "crisis" and "critical," are derived. Thus, a time of crisis is a time of division and judgment, and to criticize is to bring matters to a head, to a point of crisis. "Theory" is also from Greek *theoria*, meaning, a way of looking. Any theory then is only one way of seeing, of making sense. Any way of looking, even in science, has its limits and, as to its currency, a certain life-span. No theory has monopoly of seeing.

For any literary work, there are only two general criteria: in Tagalog, "*may saysay*" and "*may dating*." *General* criteria, for any generalization may hold water but not the sea. Both criteria, *saysay* and *dating*, vary in their appreciation and application, from reader to reader, because (to repeat) every reader draws from his/her own experience of reality, from his own preferred "theory" or "way of looking," from his current advocacy, be that Marxist or feminist or ecological, and from his community's history and culture, his community's world view, values, beliefs and biases.

But in every literary work, both "*saysay*" and "*dating*" are wrought from language.

"*May saysay*": not meaning, but meaningfulness. Not all our words can catch that meaningfulness of a human experience that has been endowed with

a definite form in the literary work; that meaningfulness is what the words of the story or poem can only evoke, reader to reader: each one needs to enter imaginatively into the human experience there mimed or simulated in the literary work. There is no fixed, unambiguous meaning for any individual human experience precisely because it is individual, having its own living context. In fact, the mimesis of the imaginary human experience in story or poem is already meaningful, so that its interpretation is redundant.

"Meaningfulness": I would say, in Filipino-Tagalog, "diwa" – I mean, the very spirit of what it is to be a *human being*, its nightshade and its sunrise, both. That is what the reader-critic attempts to apprehend at the very heart of the human experience that is simulated in the literary work. In that light, too, both the writing and the reading are a *spiritual* experience; and for that very reason, likewise, one's sensitive response to the literary work varies from individual to individual.

That *diwa* is the literary work's moral dimension: what raises it to a universal plane. The universal plane isn't the realm of eternal verities, it is rather the site of everlasting questioning.

"May dating: from that meaningfulness of the depicted human experience arises the effect, the *dynamis* or intellectual and emotional power of the literary work to interest and persuade us, to make us see and relive the experience and be moved by it. Every text is *cathectic*: that is, invested with mental and emotional energy.

If we demand from the writer a mastery of his medium, his language, by which he is able to overcome its limitations, the writer must also exact from his readers the same mastery of the language. It is the sense for language that is the basic poetic sense, and that needs to be cultivated. What deteriorates is not language itself but the sense for language among its users.

5. In conclusion, I would say that writing is a lifetime vocation – a call from language. What is the calling? if language itself could speak, what is it saying?

Language is absolutely literal, it fixes things with their names: a rose is a rose, and proud is proud, and honor is honor. But language secretly yearns to be free. It is the writer's calling to free it, to enable it to transcend itself by its own evocative power, through various rhetorical strategies. The poetic moment, or the moment of writing, as Yves Bonnefoy puts it, "open[s] to the intuition that all language refuses."

How does it happen? – through that work of imagination by which the words of a language in interplay are endowed with a power to evoke the reality of a human experience; by that energy of imagination, from both writer and reader, things are brought back alive from their names and labels that would pin them down like mere laboratory specimens.

Says Carlos Angeles in "Landscape II" - "I touch your absence here / Remembering the speeches of your hair." Only by work of imagination, on the reader's part, is the experience of a lover's desolation of yearning brought to life, and it was the poet's power of expression that made that possible. We as writers or readers have to be, in the words of Marianne Moore, "literalists of the imagination."

There is only one requirement in writing: to have a life, to live, to be fully aware of the living of it. And there is only one requirement in reading: a sense for language. The language of poetry – of all excellent writing – is language *made* aware of the sensation, the miracle of living.