



2019

From Creative Writing To a Self's Liberation: A Monologue of a Struggling Writer

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Recommended Citation

Trinh, Ethan (2019) "From Creative Writing To a Self's Liberation: A Monologue of a Struggling Writer," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

DOI: 10.7771/2153-8999.1184

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea/vol14/iss1/9>



Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement

Vol. 14 Iss. 1 (2019)

www.JSAAEA.org

Creative and Literary Works

From Creative Writing To a Self's Liberation: A Monologue of a Struggling Writer

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Abstract

The pressure of being alone in a new country and of surviving in a competitive academia has scared me to death. I cannot find any better way to heal me other than writing. Writing helps me make sense of the worlds and come closer to my true self. This piece is journeying from my own struggles of a Vietnamese, queer, immigrant teacher to accept who I am as a writer. In addition, writing this piece helps me get closer to decademizing academic writing in higher education.

Keywords: Writing, identity, liberation, struggling, academia, writer of color, monologue, school



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Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement, Vol. 14, Iss. 1. (2019) ISSN: 2153-8999

“The act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy.”

Gloria Anzaldúa (2012)

I am listening to one of my favorite blue songs, getting a cheap wine from a local store, reading an Anzaldúa’s book, and thinking about myself on a Friday night. What have I been doing since I first came to the doctoral program? I remembered at the beginning of the semester; I felt alone, exhausted, and friendless. I was struggling with a framework or formula that the academia wants me to write. I refused to do so; that is not who I am as a writer. The pressure of being alone in a new country and of surviving in a competitive academia has scared me to death. My fingers are not strong enough to type in.

While reading Anzaldúa, I am thinking about my old self. I was attempting to strip away all labels that the society tags on me: a Vietnamese, queer, accented ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher; a person who is learning how to unlearn hegemonic masculinity; a doctoral student whose responsibilities are meant to get publications; a son who is taking burdens on his shoulder to help his family to overcome financial issues; a son who is learning how to heal scars from family violence abuse (Trinh, 2018); a writer who is struggling with translanguaging and codeswitching in his writing in academia. I felt pressure in the air and got lost in the dark.

“Why did I have to strip away from those labels?” Selfishness, you may think. I was alone in a liminal space where I had to figure things out by myself. I usually ask myself: “How can I shift my perspectives from a submissive, well-trained technician to be an independent and critical scholar?”, “How can I listen to another me?”, “Is he screaming in silence?”, “Is he struggling in silence?”, “Is he afraid to tell what he thinks in mind?”, “Is he escaping with a fear of being found and seen for who he is?”, “What are you thinking?”, I was wondering. I am trying to understand

my queer self. What am i, with lowercase for the ego “I”? What am i in a lonely world—in a midst of noises and voices? Who am i to critique the world based off of the eye of a neophyte? I cannot find any better way to heal other than writing so that writing can help me make sense of the world and come closer to my true self.

Thru writing, I create my new fate. I am escaping from the cage where asks people to follow thru. Yes, “thru” instead of “through” in academic writing. I am tired of following thru with what society requires me to do. I’m tired of being assimilated while I can be me. I’m tired of rules, conventions, and doctrines. I am tired of running and chasing the unknown and un-me. As my friend says, “You have to play with its own rules.” I know rules, but I refuse to play with them. The reality is harsh, dark, and dry. It is not like the cheap wine that I am tasting now, which is sweet, smooth and more importantly, I chose it. I chose this bottle of wine to spend a night. I chose it because I am the creator of this life—my own life. I don’t belong to anyone but myself. I feel an urge to respond to that self-ness (you can call “selfishness” if you want to; that’s fine to me)—thru writing. My loneliness will be relieved when I write. My mind is set free when I write. My soul is uncuffed from the cage, from the formula, from liminal spaces. I write to be me. I write to see thru me, whether or not the society accepts me. I liberate myself thru writing, where I cannot find any concrete space to get loose of it.

While seeing a way out, I am reflecting on so-called “pedagogical approach” in instructing writing in schools. As an ESL teacher, how can I encourage my students to write creatively and take pride in their home language and identit(ies)? How can I instruct them to write toward breaking the limit of “standardized English writing?” Reflecting on my struggles in finding my gender, racial, ethnic identities, I am thinking about my students and their silences in school as

they encountered Xenophobia, Islamophobia (Trinh, 2018) and homophobia (Trinh, 2019). I, therefore, question about the role of school. “What is school?”, I wondered.

SCHOOL

School should teach students to be racist, to be homophobic, to be xenophobic, you name a few.
School should be segregated based on socio-economic statuses, classes, skin colors, races, gender, and sexual preferences, you name a few.
School is a wrong place for mercy, empathy and understanding
Toward marginalization
School should practice zero-tolerance policies when rules are broken.
School is a place where no soft heart exists.
School is a living hell.

How dare you to say so!
How dare you to think that way!
How dare you,
Son of a b*tch!

I am writing in anger, in frustration, in utmost pain
I cannot put a full stop for this; the pain is still..... goin’
Because somewhere in a space of a classroom.
A student is undergoing that experience
A student is undergoing that stereotype
A student is silenced,
is not brave enough to raise their hands
is not strong enough to tell testimonies
is not acknowledged for who they are
is alone
is inv s ble
is cryin’

Who am I? – Tôi là ai?
as a teacher, an educator,
a Vietnamese queer nepantla,
who lives across the borders and cultures,
who lives between and among worlds,
who sees and contrasts the differences
TO break down hegemony,
TO deconstruct colonialism,
TO tear away hatred, disparity, racism

I teach to connect, to link, to heal, to share with my students
In - the - living - hell

TO make *a* dream of change, of transformation, of revolution happen
WITH our pens, our strong wills, our voices, our breaths, our commitments to change
We have the dream
TO CHANGE
a living hell
TOGETHER

I can choose a formal way to describe and argue what school is, but I opted out. I decided to write creatively from the beginning in order to decademize academic writing in higher education. I write toward compassion. I write toward social justice and equity. I write toward embracing my students whose voices are silenced due to their languages and fear of being judged. I write toward embracing others, especially scholars of color so that we could create a space to write, to contribute our voices, and to find belonging and identities in academia. Therefore, this piece is wholeheartedly meaningful to me because I firmly believe each of us has important and beautiful stories to share; and we can share it creatively. During courses in a doctoral program, I ethanize my writing. To me, ethanizational writing is a HAPPY (Healing, Awakening, Painfulness, Progressiveness, and Yolo) process that a writer has a chance to sit down to converse with a self, to heal the scars (both mentally and physically), to unpuzzle mysteries, to connect dots, to retrieve memories, to forgive, to critique and to give birth to oneself one more time. You can be whoever-zational you want to be thru writing, and that should be a HAPPY process.

As putting my heart in the poem and this monologue, I want to be a part of this historic movement so that I can be *with* students, scholars, and writers of color. I believe in the power of connection and wisdom sharing that can contribute to the work of liberation and social justice. I believe our voices matter. I believe we matter, and so are our writings. That is why I write.

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About the Author



My picture will be blurry and un-united until we are getting together to work toward social justice for all.



Ethan Trinh is a transnational, queer, Vietnamese ESL Instructor in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Currently, Ethan is a doctoral student at Department of Middle and Secondary Education, Georgia State University, and is serving as a 2019 TESOLers Social Responsibilities Interest Section (SRIS) Newsletter Co-Editor. He is inspired to do research about queer transnationals, ESL, Vietnamese Studies, and Chicana Feminism.



Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement

Vol.14 Iss.1 (2019)

www.JSAAEA.org

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