2019

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

Ethan Trinh
Georgia State University, ethan.trinh14@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea>

Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

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>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

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

Ethan Trinh
Georgia State University

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

Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement*, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or JSAAEA.
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.

References

- Anzaldua, G. (2012). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Trinh, E. (2019). Breaking down the coatlicue state to see a self: Queer voices within a circle. *The Assembly*. Retrieved from <https://www.colorado.edu/journal/assembly/2019/06/05/breaking-down-coatlicue-state-see-self-queer-voices-within-circle>
- Trinh, E. (2018). How hugging mom teaches me the meaning of love and perhaps beyond. *The Journal of Faith, Education and Community*, 2(1), 1-14.
- Trinh, E. (2018, August 21). Educating students is more than teaching Content. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQ1X5n4EzLY&t=34s>

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

Editor

Dr. Wayne E. Wright
Purdue University

Associate Editors

Dr. Chhany Sak-Humphry
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Dr. Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Book Review Editor

Dr. Vichet Chhuon
University of Minnesota

Creative Works Editor

Bryan Thao Worra
Lao Assistance Center

Journal Manager

Fang Gao
Purdue University

Editorial Review Board

Dr. Steve Arounsack
California State University, Stanislaus

Dr. Sovicheth Boun
Salem State University

Dr. Virak Chan
Purdue University

Dr. Carl L. Bankston III
Tulane University

Dr. Phala Chea
Lowell Public Schools

Dr. George Chigas
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Dr. Loan Dao
University of Massachusetts Boston
Dr. Changming Duan
University of Missouri-Kansas City
Dr. Sothy Eng
Lehigh University
Dr. Vincent K. Her
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire
Dr. Peter Nien-Chu Kiang
University of Massachusetts, Boston
Dr. Kevin K. Kumashiro
University of Illinois, Chicago
Dr. Ha Lam
Eastern Mennonite University
Dr. Jonathan H. X. Lee
San Francisco State University
Dr. Monirith Ly
Royal University of Phnom Penh
Dr. Bic Ngo
University of Minnesota
Dr. Leakhena Nou
California State University, Long Beach
Dr. Mark Pfeifer
SUNY Institute of Technology
Dr. Loan T. Phan
University of New Hampshire
Dr. Karen Quintiliani
California State University, Long Beach
Dr. Angela Reyes
Hunter College
The City University of New York
Dr. Fay Shin
California State University, Long Beach
Dr. Christine Su
College of San Mateo
Dr. Alisia Tran
Arizona State University
Dr. Khatharya Um
University of California, Berkeley
Dr. Kim Tran
University of California, Los Angeles,
Glendale Community College
Dr. Soua Xiong
California State University, Fresno
Dr. Zha Blong Xiong
University of Minnesota

Dr. Hien Duc Do
San Jose State University
Dr. Sophal Ear
Occidental College
Dr. Jeremy Hein
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire
Dr. Nancy H. Hornberger
University of Pennsylvania
Dr. Peter Tan Keo
New York University
Dr. Yvonne Kwan
San Jose State University
Dr. Ravy Lao
California State University, Los Angeles
Dr. Stacey Lee
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Dr. Sue Needham
California State University, Dominguez Hills
Dr. Max Niedzwiecki
Daylight Consulting Group
Dr. Clara Park
California State University, Northridge
Dr. Giang Pham
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Dr. Malaphone Phommasa
University of California Santa Barbara
Dr. Kalyani Rai
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Dr. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials
University of Connecticut, Storrs
Dr. Nancy J. Smith-Hefner
Boston University
Dr. Yer J. Thao
Portland State University
Dr. Monica M. Trieu
Purdue University
Dr. Silvy Un
Saint Paul Public Schools
Dr. Linda Trinh Vo
University of California, Irvine
Dr. Molly Wiebie
The University of Texas at Austin
Dr. Yang Sao Xiong
The University of Wisconsin-Madison

Doctoral Student Editorial Review Board

Diana Chandara

University of Minnesota

Bao Diep

University of Minnesota

Nielsen Hul

Cornell University

Vanessa Na

University of California, San Diego

Hoa Nha Nguyen

Boston College

Linda Marie Pheng

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Mai Vang

University of Massachusetts Boston

Thong Vang

University of Minnesota

Linh Dang

University of Rochester

Annie BichLoan Duong

San Joaquin County Office of Education

Dung Minh Mao

University of Minnesota

Thien-Huong Ninh

University of Southern California

Khoi Nguyen

George Mason University

Krissyvan Truong

Claremont Graduate University

Melissa Vang

San Diego State University