

Transcending Through the Gap

By Jenya Krein

To be a writer is not just one thing. It is countless different things.

To think as a writer. To aspire to be one.

To construct in your head. To watch. To collect and to put aside. To wait for the moment. Always alone.

Alone is a blessing and a curse. These are the dialectics of a writer's life.

Is it about fame? Love? Recognition? Is it about writing for one's own sake?

To be read by those you admire.

To be a part of something. To measure and to be measured.

There is also another side to this story. It has something to do with worlds and words.

And then, there is also your way of being.

Living in a bubble, running from life to use every single irritating thing in your memory to utilize it in your own reality.

You say this is no different from the life of any pedestrian, non-writing human, someone who is collecting experiences—to taste, to learn, to know; to then use it to measure, and to analyze, and to act upon it.

Except. Except, one little thing. This person, all around nice and wonderful person, he doesn't write. Which makes all the difference.

You do.

Of course, it's all about me. Still, it's so much easier to write in a third person narrative. Just for the distance's sake.

Here it goes.

She does not write. This wish to write is a curse. It's not clear right away that she is cursed. Yet, it is unmistakable that she tries to put meaning into this activity. She wants to attach the idea of who she is to this process.

She thinks about writing when she doesn't have anything else to think about. What, when, how, where.

The thinking about writing becomes so much bigger than the writing itself.

One day, when she is about to fall asleep, she tells the person in bed besides her that this writing of hers is an obsession.

Nothing exists when I write, she tells him. There is no death, no aging, there is nothing, you see, only words.

When I write, there is only that, writing, letters, how it starts, where it's going. That may be, he says. He falls asleep. She is alone again, next to him.

It's a funny thing when, right before putting your pen on paper, you make a quick decision what language to use.

It's not about acceptance. Or if it will sell. She doesn't believe at this point that it will ever sell.

This sensation is much deeper.

Still, the decision itself is made in a matter of seconds. Does it mean that she has a dual personality? For ages, she tried to bring these two worlds closer together, merge them, and fuse. To close the gap. Is it ever a possibility? The gap is there, between lives and languages. She is both. She is neither. She is in between.

You don't take sides. Or you do. Translator, ever the traitor, ever the judge, the advocate. What makes you write? The one who only aspires and the one who puts her pen on paper, fingers on a keyboard. What's in between? Fear.

Writing is fear and the transcendence of it. The game and the player. The killer and the victim.

One fine summer...

Well, it wasn't her fine summer. Hard work and heartbreak. The only way out was to have a literary break. To buy a one way ticket into the world of literary criticism. She paid her hard-earned money to study at Yale. God knows—it was just a three day conference in a midst of suffocating and dusty July. Killer heat, no shade, no air-conditioning either.

The professor said: she didn't realize that English was not her first language.

The professor is old. She is also weary, and not very interested. But she is the best, knowledgeable and respectable. Her old dresses have no age. Her body is tired, soft and dry. Her mind is dry, too.

The professor is too old, too knowledgeable. She is done, seen it, judged it. Why did she come here? Did Yale seduce her with the new possibilities? Summer, old school, new writers. Would she find something, somebody? Perhaps, she is here to explore the market which is not even a market yet...

Many were called...

You don't know if you were even called. Maybe, you just made it all up, built yourself up. What would the latest psychobabble say? Compensating. You are compensating.

The professor said that your constructions are not viable; they will not survive the market. Not publishable.

You are not publishable. Why? Well, "why"...

The story she knew had to exist somewhere, the one she could see to its last detail, didn't work for these people. The question exhausted her: Why did she marry him? When did it happen? Where is it going? Why did it happen? Why this way, and not the other way? You should explain all these and more to your readers. You should structure your piece and you should be able to explain...

Why do I need to explain? Why do I need to explain my life? Which is it...is your reader God Himself? Or is the market your God?

The writer is innocent, the way a child is innocent, and the way Lilith was innocent, long before Eve came along. Your publishable writer is Eve and Adam rolled in one. They know what they are doing, why they are doing it. The writer doesn't.

The real writer only writes. The writer is his text. The only law is the Law of Text. Of its space and air and time and magic of it. Don't you know?

And what you want is to sell me your formula, your product. To create this product, and for me...to become one.

Maybe. Maybe, the problem is me, myself. To my own detriment, I am not this culture's product.

That is what I am thinking: Them. The people on the other side of the globe. I was their product and am no longer. The decision was made to leave. Some would say to run away.

But that is how I define my freedom: not to sell.

Do I want to sell? Absolutely. Love me for what I am.

Unfortunately, for me, the text that transcends deals with fear. The other one? You sell, you follow the formula, and you stay well within the bounds of that gloom.

Still, why did I do it? Why do I write the way I do?

They meet, he violates her, and still, she marries him. Why did she? There was no need to explain this dynamic to my other half, to those who lived my past, who still live their present.

Once I was told that American philosophy does not know the sense of European destiny. Once, when still very young, I was reading Anatole France, and the story went in three different directions. The boy leaves his village, the boy moves to Paris, the boy dies. He took three different paths. He died anyway. This sense of destiny I have in my blood.

Write in your own language, it is a beautiful hobby. What does she know?

This meditation on writing is just another way of thinking. Some people think quietly. Others need to verbalize it. These few others, what they need is to share: How do I know what I know, how do I know what I am thinking, until I've verbalized, voiced it, said it out loud to another. My way is to write it all out.

So, here it goes. Here is my other argument: I am considering, thinking, meditating.

There is another path, and that is to convert. Adopt their mentality; make the main character win at all costs. Make him part of this soil; let him put roots into this history. She didn't say this, she was merely implying it. I didn't want to listen.

I come from another culture. For them—them!—I am just that, a heathen. A stranger. I've crossed over. Came from there to be here. But. But, don't you think that the writer is always, always a stranger. Alienation is a human condition, after all.

Well, the voice of reason tells me: Now, just take it all in, blend yourself in; don't be a sore thumb.

But the way I write is from my memory, from my old self. Everything which is under the rug, swept under...it comes to life. It comes out, the old self that I've left behind. And then...And then I am all alone again trying to explain myself.

In this case, I am trying to explain my writing, my way of thinking.

How can I even attempt to describe the nature of people who housed me for a good half of my life, those who passed onto me their unspoken beliefs, myths, priorities, customs, ways of doing things, ways of thinking—and yes, writing!—that the prevailing nature of these people is humbleness, submissiveness, passivity, dreaminess, lack of motivation and any desire to take it upon themselves to change this habitual and age-old way of life.

As I said, an interpreter strides over both of his worlds, and doesn't become any of it. He listens. He interprets. He is here, and he is not.

I say "words." I say "worlds." I say "my mortal flesh." The hope is that the words will stay. Even if we transcend. Go onto something else, leaving the mortal flesh behind. The doom, in part, is that for the writer his own resurrection comes through words. Flesh turns into words, resurrects through words.

The gap, the gap is always there. Sometimes you merge, sometimes you step aside. As if, you were God. Only while the text moves on.

The separation from text, that is hard. Then you have to live your life. Work. Eat. Sleep. Hey, you have to pay your taxes! Being mortal, like everybody else. All over again.