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Writing as lanterns, lanterns as creases!

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Panel: Writing as Recovery

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Writing as lanterns, lanterns as creases!

By Sabah Sanhuri (Sudan)

Why do I write? Or, put another way, when I do write?

When I find myself feeling one or more of the following: confused, in denial, abandoned, angry, conned, sad, worthless, tired of Life. And also when I feel proud, smart, and a person who knows everything there is to know about Life.

When I am experiencing one or more of the negative feelings, and the weight on my shoulders starts to feel too heavy to bear, I start to write, and the anger and sadness fade away after the first two words!

Most of the time I feel like life is a great deception. Happiness, sadness, pride, kindness, confusion, desire, sense of denial; any and all of these lead me to this conclusion.

When I first started to write, I thought of the act as a link between two worlds: misery and the joy of life. Later, writing became “The Vision” of life, of seeing behind the scenes. Writing allowed me to see life from another perspective, or even just beyond the normal or natural definition of it. Later still, writing became temporary relief from long-lasting pain, a kind of masturbation, of trying to reach a state of pleasure. Writing is thus a form of masturbation that we do on a daily or weekly basis depending on what we want. Sometimes we don’t hesitate to spoon with life itself and give it pleasure. But, we have to be careful not to masturbate too frequently, or else we might just cause chronic and severe damage to our brains! Especially to our vision, and so we risk becoming blind! Though even worse than being blind is having sight but no vision!

Sometimes writing is a mirror that helps us see reality, despite the fact that not all mirrors show or reflect the truth – if there is such a thing as truth. Or put another way, writing is like holding a lantern: you need one to find a way out of the dark, as long as your eyes haven’t adjusted to the darkness yet.

I always feel like using writing as a way out, an exit, regardless of the specific kind of writing. And I also think that the responsibility of a writer is that of holding the reader’s hand, tightly, and of showing them the way out by rowing as hard as you can to help them reach a shore of enlightenment, or at least by driving them to a bus station!

For me, writing is a lot like sex. Sometimes, we are seduced by writing, and sometimes we get our “periods” or just lose motivation, and sometimes we write when we’re feeling so sad or happy that we can’t handle the emotion without letting it out through writing.

Writing helps to get rid of our natural habit of attachment. It cleans us, and lets us get rid of all the misery in ourselves. Do not get attached to anything, please! This reminds me of that poem by Elizabeth Bishop about the art of “losing”. She said – and I quote directly:

WRITING AS RECOVERY

“Lose something every day;
I lost two cities, lovely ones,
And vaster, some realms I owned,
Two rivers, a continent, I miss them,
But it wasn't a disaster!”

Each word we write, whether it be in the form of a poem, story, play, prose, essay or anything else, will dig deep creases into us. The more we see and the more we hold hands, the more numerous, the deeper and the more permanent those creases will be.

At last, we have to undress ourselves, start writing, and raise that lantern.