

TLC Showcase

ROMALYN ANTE

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Introduction to Romalyn's poetry

On Winning the Creative Future Literary Award

In 2017 Romalyn was announced as the winner of the Creative Future Literary Award for Poetry. The Awards are supported by The Literary Consultancy's Free Read scheme, and as part of her prize, we are delighted to welcome Romalyn onto the Chapter and Verse mentoring scheme, which will support her as she works on a collection of new poetry.

I have profound respect in schemes and competitions which promote artists from diverse and under-represented backgrounds. Being from a minority background, I feel that the Creative Future Literary Award (CFLA) is a very significant award as it gives importance not only to writers of colour but also to other under-represented writers such as those with mental or physical disabilities, and more. The award does not only provide a monetary prize but also invaluable development and industry support. In 2016, I was commended by the CFLA, and the experience opened new doors to me, such as meeting new people and discovering other writers and their works. Furthermore, being commended made me believe in my work. When CFLA opened for entries again in 2017, I was sure I would want to give it another try.

Their competition theme, 'important nothings' really intrigued and challenged me as a writer. I tried writing a poem for the competition and I was certain I wanted to give my best and ensure that my poem was at its finest and was suitable to the theme. For a few days, I was exploring the theme 'important nothings'. For me, my poem should not only be focused on the subject itself but also reflect my own identity as someone from the minority background. So I drafted the poem, Way Back Home, which was about an important Filipino superstition that was shared by my father. Hence the first lines: 'This is the most important secret / my father told me: / Whenever you are lost / you must turn your shirt inside out.' The process of submitting was very easy as it was done online and the CFLA team continually updated us of the competition's progress.

The award ceremony took place during Birmingham Literature Festival where CFLA invited writers Kit de Waal and Sabrina Mahfouz to speak. To my surprise, I was not only commended this time, but was given the highest award for poetry, Platinum Award. This massive shift from being 'commended' the previous year to receiving the Platinum Award has boosted my confidence as a writer and validated the works and development that happened to me through the year. Speaking to the CFLA team gave me direction and support in achieving my writing goals. Now, we are still in contact, planning to arrange my Chapter & Verse mentoring scheme through TLC, along with my final manuscript assessment, and industry advice session. All of these are vital to my development and progress as a poet. This has been an immense help in pushing me towards the right direction.

Selected Poems, by Romalyn Ante

Way Back Home

(The way home is a thousand leagues - Yi Yang-yon)

This is the most important secret
my father told me:
*Whenever you are lost,
you must turn your shirt inside out.*

As a family, we inverted
our tropical print vests
when instead of white sands
we found a barren land
of black stones,
wrecked plastic bottles
like a smack of jellyfish.

I did it again with my blouse;
in childhood, when my siblings left me
by the rice-sack swing; when the blue-eyed
dragonflies darted off and my heart
became a ripe makopa with ants
instead of seeds at the core.

I followed my father's advice,
and survived the hypnotic gaze
of a pavo, and the buffalo
standing as a gatekeeper
between me and the path home.

Soon, I found the landmark:
the chapel
where my father confessed
his feelings for my mother, where
scents of sampaguita emanated
from Christ's stigmata.

Now, in a foreign land,
all the red buses are stranded.

I stroll in ankle-deep snow
back to the piss-scented flat
where my parents discuss
the divorce papers.

I stop under the lamp-lit flurry,
almost take my coat off
and turn it inside out.

**Won Creative Future Literary Award, 2017*

Patis

If there is one vivid memory I have of Batangas,
it is of a favourite dish: sheen pieces of bullet tuna
wrapped in banana leaves, with earth-dark *kamias*,
simmered in a terracotta pot.

If there is one vivid memory I have of that house,
it is the plastic table mat. Floral-printed, sleek
in the light sifting through the window rails.
I cringed at the thought that the mat would coil
when the hot pot was laid.
My grandma's specialty. Sour-salt to the bone
best eaten with boiled rice, using bare hands.

Two decades on, no one cooks patis anymore.
My grandma, in her wheelchair, calls me 'sister'.
The locals no longer nap in the afternoon.
The grove of mango and bilimbi, the cornfields,
the water buffalos – all replaced by tiles and lifts.

There is a certain sour-salt taste
I always long for.

Last Offices

"A poem is a meteor" – Wallace Stevens

There's a volcano in the middle of a lake, in the crater
of a bigger volcano. Meteors dash across the water.

There's wind and little tornadoes of petals.
But it's dark, and they could be cicada shells.

I dream (or recall) that place on the night
I have to bed-wash my first carcass.

The volcano in the lake is stiff. Silent. But frogs
and crickets' songs swell like jaundiced hands.

Rock-hard shoulders. Spots bloom on her lips like petunias.
I wipe the summit of her cheeks, the valleys of her fingers.

I comb the lianas of her hair, flatten her eyelids,
take off two dulling rings, and seal them in an envelope.

And I remember the volcano in the lake. That night
the meteor rain sings to the moon's nail-clipping.

(These poems were first published in *Rice & Rain*, V. Press, 2017)

About the Writer

Romalyn Ante grew up in Lipa Batangas, Philippines. At 16, she migrated to the UK with her family. She currently works as a nurse and a counsellor in Wolverhampton.

She has been published in wide variety of magazines in the UK, USA, and Southeast Asia. Her works appeared in Under the Radar, Ink, Sweat, & Tears, Haiku Journal, Eastlist, Anak Sastra Literary Ezine, amongst others.

She writes about her work as a nurse in the NHS and the private sector, migration and diaspora.

In 2017 her debut pamphlet, [Rice & Rain](#), was published by V. Press. In the same year, she became a Jerwood/Arvon mentee (2017-2018) and is currently under the guidance of poet, Pascale Petit. She also recently joint-won the Manchester Poetry Prize, was awarded Platinum for Poetry in Creative Futures Literary Award and was commended in the Battered Moons Poetry Competition.

In November 2017, she travelled back to the Philippines after receiving an Artist's International Development Fund to write about identity and cultural reconnections and was mentored by award-winning poet, Marjorie Evasco.

Most recently, she was chosen to be one of the three poets in Primers Volume 3 (Nine Arches Press/The Poetry School). Her poetry manuscript, Half-empty, will be published in Primers in 2018.

She is working towards her first full collection which she hopes to publish in the future.

Romalyn blogs under ['Ripples of the River'](#) and tweets at [@RomalynAnte](#)

