



# BEHIND THE PAGES

*- an interview with Indonesian writers -*

Windy Ariestanty | Winna Efendi | Rahne Putri | Dewi Kharisma Michellia | Elia Bintang |  
Maesy Ang & Teddy Kusuma | Windry Ramadhina | Gratiagusti C. Rompas | Theoresia Rumthe |  
Bernard Batubara | Llia (Aulia) Halimatussadiah | + Bonus: Hanny Kusumawati interviewing herself |

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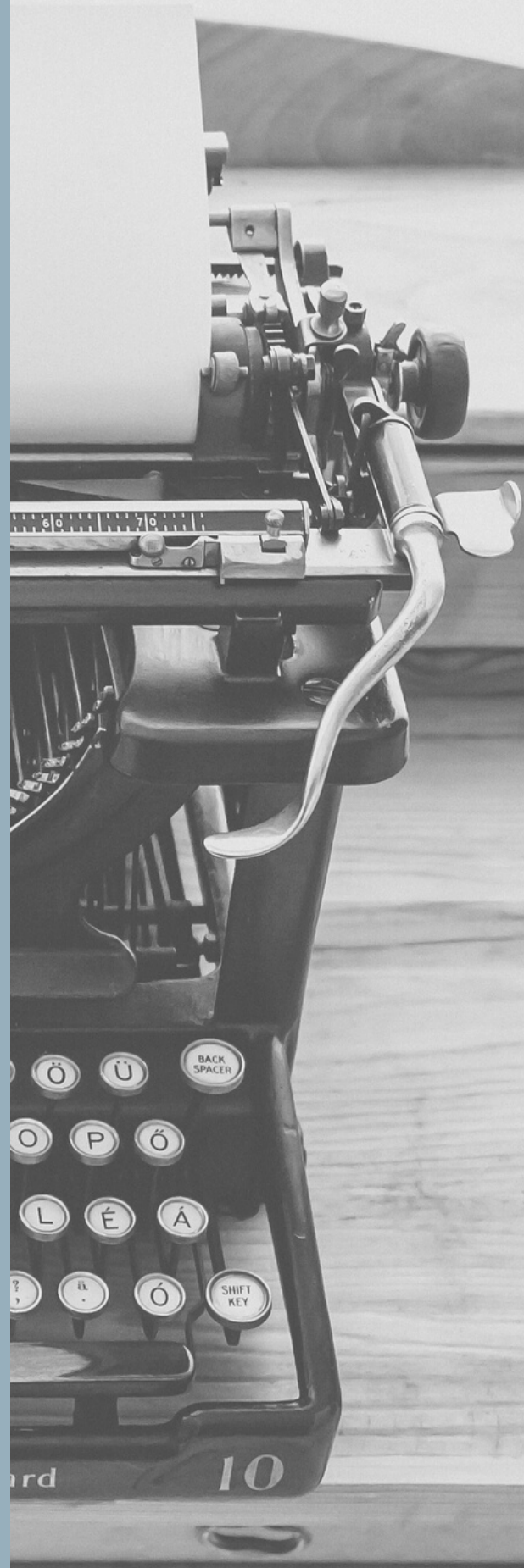
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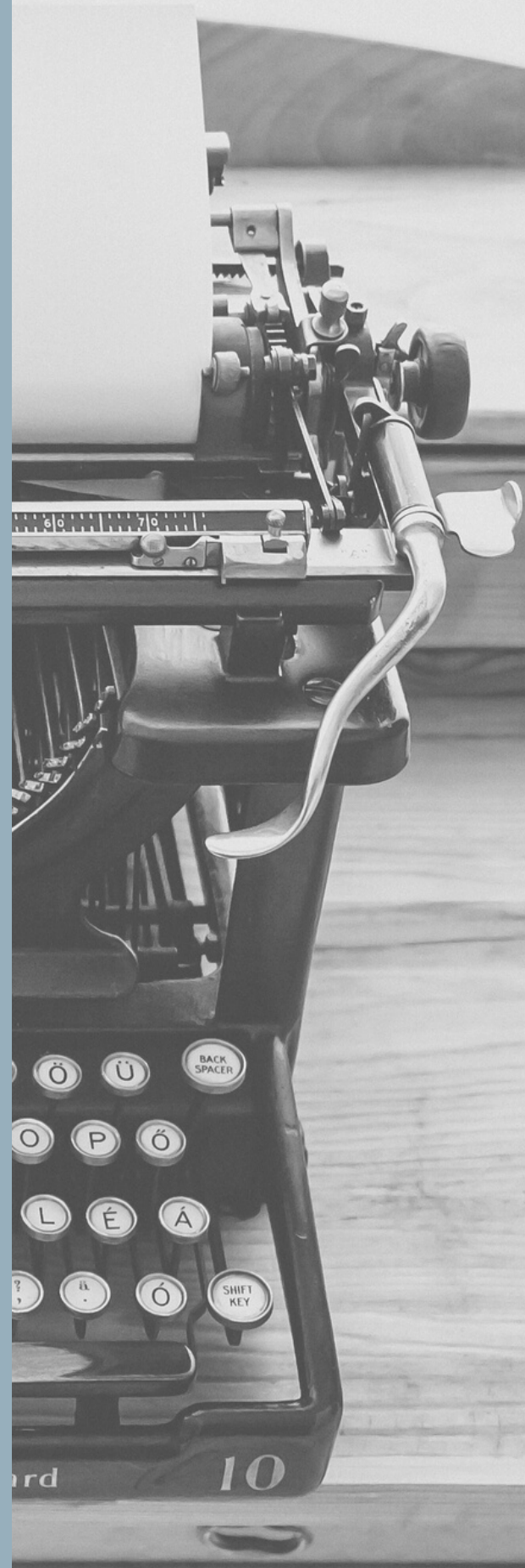
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# INTRODUCTION

*about behind the pages*


**Behind the Pages** is a column I started in my blog in 2014, where I publish interviews with Indonesian writers on their creative process, inspiration, daily rituals, and other things related to living a life as a writer.

It was born out of my selfishness (and curiosity) to find out what is going on inside the mind of fellow writers.

I always feel like writing is such a silent, solitary, and private thing; and exactly for this reason, I find it irresistible to have an intimate conversations with fellow writers about the (sometimes magical and mysterious) unfolding of their works; the untold story behind the pages of their books.

*hanny*





*fill up  
those  
empty  
pages.*

---

*have  
fun.*



# WINDY ARIESTANTY

*on writer-editor relationship*

**The script that is being published and the script that isn't being published. What are the 3 most basic things that differentiate the "fate" of those two, based on your experience?**

Windy: Hahaha. This is a tricky question. But let me rewind an 'old song' that people have always known all these times—but they forget it many times.

No matter what, books have two faces. Business face and social face (when it comes to 'art', for the time being, let's put it under the social face). Based on those two faces, as short as my experience taught me, I can summarise them into 3:


1. Theme. A theme that answer market needs or gives information about what the market will need in



the future. A publisher must have known about the readers of the script that will be published. Is the theme answer market needs or even a few steps further from the existing market? The ability to predict themes that can answer market needs or go one/two-step further from the existing market is the ability to create “trend”.

2. Content. When buying a book, a question people always ask would be: what is this book about? When it comes to writing, forever, content is the king.

3. The writing. How the theme and content are being written. No matter what, good writing is the first catch to grab the attention of an editor. Editors easily fall in love with good writing.

 **What are the most common misconceptions held by aspiring writers who are about to publish their first books?**

Windy: There are several things.

1. Editing stage. A writer often assumes that the editor is someone who will scrutiny his script. Someone who will tear his masterpiece apart. In reality, your editor is your writing

partner. She is the first reader who tries to see the hole in your script. Not one single editor wants to damage her writer’s piece. She is the first person that will clap her hands when you finish your writing, and she is also the first person who will go brokenhearted when your writing is not becoming any better.

Another misconception is that the editor is the person who will take care of all typos and errors on your script. Come on, that’s not the job of an editor. You can activate the spell-checker facility if you only need this function from an editor. An editor’s responsibility is way more than that.

On a very ideal level, an editor needs to have the ability to guess and create book trends. True, an editor will help taking care of all those stuff regarding structure, grammar, and typo. But my suggestion is this: before sending your script out, there is no harm in cleaning up all those typos.

Trust me, no matter how bad the script is, an editor can still read it when the typos are minimal. Help the editors to enjoy reading your script by minimizing typos. Won’t you feel tortured reading a raw script with typos scattered all over from the first to the last page?

Sending a script without a title. Yes, the publisher will help you in finding a title for your to-be-published script. But sending out a script without a title shows that you don't even know what your script is all about.

## 2. Publishing contract.

A publisher only has the 'publishing right', not 'copyright'. The contract only binds the writing/script, not the writer. Thus, before signing a contract, pay close attention to this. Don't regret it later. Go through your contract carefully before signing it.

## 3. Do I need to pay?

A lot of writers still think that they need to pay some amount of money to publish their books. I am going to say this straightforwardly: you don't need to pay for anything. On the contrary, you will have royalty rights for your script.

## 4. Promotion is a publisher's business.

Most of the times, a writer believes that as a writer, his task is limited to writing only. Unfortunately, life nowadays expects more than that.


A writer also needs to think about what he's going to do after the book is

published.

Of course, the publisher will think about that. They will think about book distributions and how to get attractive displays in bookstores, or about sending free copies to media or colleagues. They may even think about book launching or discussions. But they are not taking care of only one single writer.

Also, it will be impossible for them to keep on promoting the same book over and over again. Based on my limited knowledge, I concluded that the most effective promotion tool for a book is its writer.

Thus, I always ask writers to learn about how to 'sell' both themselves and their works. They also need to learn how to develop themselves into a brand (self-branding).

 **How does Windy-the-Editor influence Windy-the-Writer, and vice versa?**

Windy: Hahaha. This is a bit hard to explain, but have you ever heard this sentence: you can write badly, but you need to edit your writing well? I have this mindset. To edit well, of course, you need to know about good writing, right? So, when I write, I just



write. I push the “off” button on my mind as an editor. When I finish my writing, I will read it again. This is the time when I turn on my editor’s brain. I try to see what is not working in my script and what’s working. Then I edit and revise it.

My knowledge as an editor helps me to see my script more clearly and objectively.

To me, an editor should be able to become a writer. She knows what good writing is like. So it’s only natural that she can produce good writing.

An editor who doesn’t become a writer—well, to me they look like a dead chicken in a rice barn.

Although I have to admit it myself, that for an editor to be a writer, she needs to defeat the fear inside of herself: hey, as a writer who edits and an editor who writes, you’re gambling your reputation. If your writing is good, people will say, that’s natural, she’s an editor. If your writing is bad, generally people will say, how come an editor produce such bad writing? What does it tell about her quality as an editor?

In reality, being a writer and being an



editor is two different things. We can’t even write while editing.

It’s difficult, isn’t it?

When it comes to how my profession as a writer influences me as an editor? It will be easier for me to inform a writer about what to do because I understand how these writers’ minds work.

It will also be easier for the writers to accept my inputs because they can see that I also do what I preach and I go through all the difficulties they are facing. The probability to get comments like, “It’s easy for you to just say it all. You don’t know how hard it is to write and revise!” is minimal, because I also write.

But I have to admit, I am lucky to

have a profession as a writer and an editor. Both support each other. Both teach me to have above-average listening skills. Writer-editor who doesn't learn to listen will face difficulties in becoming better.

### **What is the relationship between inspiration and discipline when you write?**

Windy: I am a slow writer. I will let you know that before I am being delirious.

To work with a material, I need to read it many times, let it seep in, and only then: writing it down.

Inspirations, indeed, can come in a short burst. When it happens, I will catch it in a hurry. I believe that inspirations are everywhere. But they are also looking for those who can become their "masters". Someone who will execute them into something—who will make them manifest.

At times like these, I will write or note it down hurriedly. I don't care how bad my writing is when I'm doing this. Afterward, I'll leave it to seep in, and then I'll polish it into better writing.

Isn't writing a matter of rewriting

over and over again?

When it comes to discipline, that's another thing. I know that I oftentimes get lazy. Not being discipline to myself. The temptation to create an excuse so I don't have to write is plenty. I'm tired. I don't have time. I am not in the mood. I don't feel like this idea is good enough. As a result, everything stops in the "wanting" level, instead of in the "doing" level. To be honest, this state sweeps me often as well.

But writing is not for the lazy ones. Writing needs a strong will and extraordinary discipline. So I try to craft times to write in the midst of my busy days 'playing around'. Hahaha. Hey, it's fun. To win over time or even defeat it—is always pleasing to me.

### **Are you the type who believes in writer's block?**

Windy: Let me tell you one more thing based on my not-so-many experience.

Writer's block, to me, is just an excuse to cover up the fact that we're lazy to write. I am not the type who believes in writer's block. Saying that I am not writing because I do not have any



idea—to me that's bullshit. If you're lazy then you're just lazy. That's fine. That's human.

Writing is about discipline in practice. Of course, a vacation for a writer is not writing. Similar to the concept of taking vacations, it feels so good not to write. So, if you want to take vacations from writing, go ahead, and do whatever you want to trigger your creativity and create the desire to write again soon. Play around.

those I haven't met in a long time, those I have just met, close friends, boyfriend, etc. I like conversations and meetings. From here, new ideas often spring to life.

A writer will not be able to suppress her desire to write something that inspires her. Thus, go out and see anyone. They could be the ones who fish the inspirations out of you and drag you out from the laziness to write.

*"A writer will not be able to suppress her desire to write something that inspires her."*

However, I also control my 'vacation period' so I don't keep myself from not writing for too long. Even if I don't feel like going back to the script I am working on, I will write other things to 'warm-up' my machine.

Another simple thing I do to keep my machine warm—even when I am swept by laziness, is by reading and watching movies.

Or... this is my favorite part: creating quality time with selected people. I can pick these people randomly—

**Looking back, what makes you start writing in the first place?**

Windy: Simple. I write down a lot of things because I want to prolong my memories.

*Windy Ariestanty is the Editor in Chief of GagasMedia and Bukune, two of the most well-known publishing companies in Indonesia today. She is also a writer who loves to travel. Her travelogue Life Traveler was shortlisted at Anugerah Pembaca Indonesia or Indonesian Reader's Award in 2012.*



# WINNA EFENDI

## *on writing process*

**How's your writing process? How do you decide on which idea to be developed first? Are you the kind of writer who obeys an outline?**

Winna: Usually, I set my deadline and my writing target. Basically, in one year, I want to finish two books. It depends on my writing schedule as well, which needs to compete with my working schedule and other stuff.

When I am having a heavy workload or there are any obstacles in writing, at least I can have 1 book in 1 year. There are even times when I don't write at all!

But most of the times, it takes me up to 6 months to write, research, and edit the whole manuscript until the moment I send it out to the publisher. After that, I'll take a long break to recharge by reading books, watching

movies, doing anything I like—as some kind of a personal reward.

Sometimes, several ideas catch my attention and stimulate me to write them down, but I try to focus on one project before moving on to the next. I save and develop the ideas I have first until they feel ‘ripe’ enough and ready to be written down. Only then, I start to write them down.

I tend to choose one idea that excites me the most. The one that makes me want to start writing as soon as possible, and put other ideas on hold while I focus on that one.

My writing process can be summarized as ideas first, brainstorm later. I brainstorm while creating plots, creating plots while researching, and I keep on researching during the time I write. They don’t always come in that order, so in my writing process, some are usually overlapping: from research to plotting, to brainstorming process.


I usually create an outline for my plot, and most of the time, I use and follow it.

But it doesn’t mean I don’t make room for deviations or other developments outside the scribbled

outline. I tend to trust where my instincts and ideas take me and enjoy the ride.

When all is done, I go through 2 phases of self-editing. The first one is to rewrite the whole manuscript while fixing my grammar, diction, idea development—or cutting down or adding more chapters. The second is to ensure that the plot makes sense, the flow is smooth and the manuscript is enjoyable to be read.

The last step is proofreading to check the spelling and the overall quality of the draft. Then, I send it out to my editor and cross my fingers.

 **What’s the most challenging part of writing, editing, and publishing? How do you deal with it?**

Winna: The most challenging part about writing is that it takes a great deal of discipline and effort to finish a manuscript. I may get distracted by other ideas, personal lives, books, work, movies, the Internet, or simply do not have the time to write. To deal with this, I set a deadline and a target, then try to fulfill it as best as I can.

During the months when I’m writing a book, I tend to avoid reading other books and just spend most of my time



writing away (although sometimes I can't help but sneak in a movie or two during the week!).

English, which was being published in Australia. What's the story behind this?

*"I tend to choose one idea that excites me the most. The one that makes me want to start writing as soon as possible..."*

Editing for me is as complicated—if not more difficult, than writing. We can rewrite or delete paragraphs, change our course, or abandon a manuscript during our writing process—which starts almost like a blank canvas. But editing is an entirely different process because we're working on a draft that is already 'done'.

That's why I have several phases of editing, then proofreading, so I can present the best manuscript I can write to my editor/publisher, and eventually, to my readers.

As for publishing, feedbacks from editors and readers are the challenge. We can write anything we want, but in the end, it is their opinions that mold us and help to define us as a writer.

**Before writing novels, you started by writing some short stories, in**

Winna: It was like an online community where readers and writers gather and I was lucky to have a few of my stories published there and be given feedback by the readers.

At first, I participated just for fun, and I wrote a short story Pink or Black about a pair of teenage twins. I tried to send it out, and surprisingly, it got published! Another story, Bus Driver's Wife, was also being published there. That was the starting point of my writing passion when I realized that I loved to write and would like to continue doing so.

**Do you feel more comfortable writing in Indonesian? Or in English? What are the challenges to maneuver between the two?**

Winna: At first, I was more comfortable writing in English, because that was the first language I

used when I tried writing short stories and novel. That was also the language I used at school or in universities, so I was more accustomed to that. However, lately I practiced writing in Indonesian more often, and now I write in Indonesian more than in English.

The challenge to write in both languages... I guess, sometimes I think about a word or a sentence or a story in one language, but I need to write it in the other language. Sometimes I cannot find the words in the other language that shares the exact meaning with the words I want to write and vice versa.

Moreover, when the words that share similar meanings are not 'identical' when they are being translated into another language.

**A lot of aspiring writers (especially those who are writing a novel) stop in the middle because they have no idea how to carry on. Sometimes, they don't know how to connect the dots and make the story flows from the beginning to the end. Do you have any suggestions to help overcome this problem?**

Winna: That happened to me a few times before. I stopped in the middle

when I was writing Refrain and Unforgettable because I ran out of ideas, and I wasn't ready to write them down. I also have folders for other projects on my laptop that do not have an ending yet.

Some of the things we can do:

1. Brainstorming. Sometimes a new idea will pop up so that we can continue writing our story.
2. Creating an outline. Planning your plot can help to prevent you from suddenly "running out of ideas" in the middle of your story. At least, you already know the ending or the flow of the conflicts beforehand.
3. 'Cooling down' your manuscript until you get a new idea.



4. Moving on can be another feasible option when you feel stuck. Because not all of our manuscripts ends nicely. That can be a practice material and a lesson for us—to avoid facing the same problem for our future projects.

**Do you have a special place to write?  
Do you think where you write affect  
the quality of your writing?**

Winna: I don't have a favorite spot. I can write as long as the place is quiet and I can sit comfortably with a glass of water by my side. Sometimes music helps, especially if the place is noisy. Sometimes, it distracts me.

Usually, I write by typing directly on my laptop. But, for ideas, brainstorming, research, and plotting, I still write them by hand in my "Idea Journal".

My preference is to write in a place I'm already comfortable with, so I prefer writing at home or at the office rather than writing in other unfamiliar places or the outdoors.

Where I write affects my focus. And my focus will affect the quality of my writing.

*Winna Efendi is a writer who has published several novels such as Kenangan Abu-Abu (February 2008), Ai (February 2009), Refrain (September 2009), Glam Girls Unbelievable (December 2009), Remember When (March 2011), Unforgettable (January 2012), and Truth or Dare (Gagas Duet May 2012). Her books have also made their ways into the big screen. Winna's non-fiction book is Draft 1: Taktik Menulis Fiksi Pertamamu (September 2012). She also participated in an anthology travelogue, The Journeys (March 2011).*





# RAHNE PUTRI

*on words, sadness, and places*

Where do your words come from?  
What made you attracted to words  
and poems in the first place?

Rahne: Where do my words come from? Honestly, I don't know. Sometimes I am also surprised how poetic words come out at certain times. This question made me think. Probably it was gradually shaped by my childhood ambiance. I do not

remember it specifically (because actually, I'm forgetful), but apparently, I recorded a lot of things from my family's habit, and those things were kept in my subconscious.

In the old days, Eyang Putri (grandmother) loved to tell stories and write letters for me when she missed me (obviously, with a very formal Indonesian like how it was

back then). I also recalled a piece of a love letter from Romo (father) for my mom, glued into the back of her cupboard's door—which I love to secretly read. Or a poem about “Dad” on the bedroom wall of Eyang Romo (grandfather). I grew up in a loving and romantic family.

Moreover, I also love to dissect dialogues from theaters, movies (from cartoon to romance), to melancholic lyrics from love songs. It seems like these things shaped me to end up loving words and poems.

**How does it feel to be inside of you during moments when words or story ideas pop up in your head?**

Rahne: Usually when these things pop up, I want to enjoy solitude. Because there are many disputes over what's on my head and what's on my heart, so I try to focus and identify the things I want to feel and convey. I try to make myself truly exist, expressed and present to accompany me when the inspiration comes. It feels like loneliness. There are only me, time, and thoughts.

**Some writers said that they are more productive during sadness or heartbreaks.**

**Does sadness fuel you?**

Rahne: Ha! Yes! I feel it! When I am sad or anxious, I tend to question a lot of things and it triggers me to keep daydreaming or think about all the possible answers. Question marks urgently reverberate from my heart, then crawl to my head and my fingers to be expressed through writings.

When I'm happy, my heart does not question much. I even tend not wanting to write.

**Does sadness fuel me?**

Yes, it does. I love my sadness, to be exact. It doesn't mean that I want to be sad all the time, but I always capture the beauty in sadness (thus, Sadgenic).

Sadness allows me to be honest with what I feel and directs me to know better about what is it that I truly want.

Sadness is an opportunity to appreciate losses and longings. Sadness is the energy for me to keep moving... away from it.

**What's your favorite place to write? What can we see or feel when we sit there?**

Rahne: I don't have a special desk or

place to write, because inspirations come to me in various places. Every time I prepare the time for it, it doesn't come! (laugh).



However, in my writing space, you'll feel nothing but stillness.

Usually, I play instrumental music and have a clock nearby so I can hear it ticks. Both are the rhythms that guard me as I write. Oh, and you may hear the sound of trickling water.

There's always a corner in my writing space (in my imagination) that needs to be wet—either from rain or tears.

Another habit, I often close my eyes when I am about to write, because there lies a huge window, and I have to go past it to start the journey to my imagination.

**How do you approach bookstores? And if you can build one, how would it look like?**

Rahne: I'll share a little about my imagination as I enter a bookstore or a library. Usually, I'd rather visit the hidden corners—which others rarely see or pass.

I always imagine that books are waiting to be flipped open and to be read.

I have the habit to 'give lives' to objects around me since I was little, so those books, in my mind, are storytellers—waiting for someone to listen to their stories.

When walking through the shelves, it feels like all of them say: "read me, read me" or "pick me" with various tones of voice. For instance, it would be an old guy's voice when it's a vintage book, or a child's voice because it's a children's book, or a female's voice, impatient to tell the love stories inside.

Imaginations aside, the kind of books I look for are mostly poetry books and children's books that are full of pictures. I am also attracted to books with a lovely cover, and books with sweet, nice, and curiosity-arousing



opening note.

My childhood dream is to have a bookstore with huge windows, for the sunlight to enter, and people can read with sufficient natural light. Then there are couches, so they can read the book they find. And in one of the corners, I'll prepare hot tea and cakes.

going through, what they are feeling.

Often, in airports or train stations, my emotional examinations are richer, because everyone is in the position of waiting, then they move away, or move towards something.

Those places are full of goodbyes and

*"Essentially, I like places with the concept of 'waiting'. Those places are full of goodbyes and hellos."*

 **How do places affect your writings?**

Rahne: Essentially, I like places with the concept of 'waiting'. A seaside or a hill where someone sits—waiting for the sun to rise or set, or a coffee shop where someone is waiting for a friend.

I love to watch people in places with such concept, guessing what they are

hellos. So, some anxieties or hopes I capture there are being carried on through my writings.

I am also thankful to have a bit of (overly) active imagination because there are loads of future places I dreamed of that I have visited. Maybe they are not real, but it feels so fun to mash them up with something I want to write, feel, and tell.

Rahne Putri is a poet and a published writer with her book *Sadgenic*. She also contributes her stories for *Cerita Sahabat*, *The Journeys 2*, and *Jika*. Her words can be found through her poetic blog entries or her Twitter account—with more than 77K followers.



# DEWI KHARISMA MICHELLIA

*on death, dreams, and madness*

“What made you start writing? What can you remember from those days?

Michel: I want to have friends. As an only child with busy parents who would only come home near the breaking of dawn, oftentimes, I only befriended the mirror. My grandmother always persuaded me to go to sleep, telling me that I didn't need to wait for my parents. She did

it by serenading songs about frogs. Those songs told stories.

Since then, sometimes when my parents were at home, I would ask them to tell me stories. My father would prefer wayang stories, while my mother adored East Asian stories.

Their customs of telling stories ended the day I could read. My grandfather

taught me how to write the alphabets on our house's terrace, and I read those letters when I was 4. The next day, my parents bought me a huge-sized legend storybook. They did not allow me to buy comics.

But I guessed I learned a lot about dialogues from the comics I borrowed from the reading garden.

Suzue Miuchi neatly told a story of the Japanese legend Amaterasu, Izanagi, and Izanami. Also, Topeng Kaca (Glass Mask), about a girl's struggle to pursue her dream as a theatrical actress. There was Candy Candy from Yumiko Igarashi, portraying juvenile's cheerfulness, and the ups and downs of their lives. I learned writing complex stories from them, as well as from R.A. Kosasih's graphic stories of Mahabharata and Bharatayudha.

I am pretty sure that my love for those childhood readings made me have the courage to write my first short story, although later on, my first story was triggered by something very trivial. I had been writing a lot of poems since my last years in elementary school, but I started writing prose when I was in my second year in junior high. The reason was inconsequential. At the

time, my classmate wrote a short story on the back pages of her book, because she was bored in Math class. Her stories were so much liked. I also experienced similar boredom when it comes to school, so I did the same thing, although my short story didn't circulate as hers.

When I first started, I wrote every day. I liked to compete with time. On the first day, I remembered that to write 3 pages of a short story, I needed to contemplate in front of the computer for more than a day. The next day, to write 6 pages, I needed only 6 hours. The peak of my achievement, when it comes to timing, I could write 3,000 words in 2 hours.

However, considerations on the quality of my writings had only kicked in when I enrolled in a writing site, [Kemudian.com](http://Kemudian.com). Finding the site was like finding treasures. Someone in that site supported me to go to college in Yogyakarta, learn English more diligently, and read more.

In Yogya(karta), everything developed so rapidly. My writing skills were sharpened in the campus press community I participated in. Before, I had never thought that really good writing came from tenths of the



editing process. To write one article that is worth publishing—and still, being evaluated as bad writing by our seniors—I needed to sleep over for days to see my writing being edited. It happened for 2 years. We're not only competing with speed, data accuracy, and choices of perspectives but also needed to know how to write something with novelty.

Although it seems like I am really tough in facing my writing routines, I consider my process of creation resembling Paul Cezanne's story, that was written by Malcolm Gladwell in "Late Bloomers".

I spend too much time to repeatedly

reaching 22 today, I think the amount reach hundreds. However, I have never felt afraid that my writings are not worth printing or publishing. Because in every piece of work, I dedicate it only to a certain amount of people.

**If there are at least 3 things that become the signature of your writings, what are those things? Why do you think they repeatedly appear in your works?**

Michel: Death, dream, and madness.

Death, since my mother was diagnosed with cancer. At the time I was in my second year in junior high,

*"I am always haunted by doubts. However, I have never felt afraid that my writings are not worth printing or publishing."*

feel frustrated and stop. The last time, I took a vacation from writing fiction for one full year.

And although I realize this tendency, still I am always haunted by doubts. If I count how many times I complain about how I feel so tired and bored dabbling in fiction writing, until I'm

and I started to write with the theme of cancer-inflicted death. It became stronger after my mother passed away when I was in my last year in high school.

The day when Mother died was such an impossible day for me. As a fiction writer, I laughed at myself, who had

had random thoughts about my mother's death. That evening, it was as if my life had turned into metafiction. It wasn't clear which was real and which was not.

I saw myself as a fictional character who didn't know how to face such a plot, and whether I could negotiate with the writer to, for instance, resurrect Mother from death. Thus far, Mother had become a single parent, there were only two of us left, and without Mother, I felt like I would live alone.

That moment stuck within me, how I cried in front of the hospital room when I saw that the room was empty, how I felt as if I wouldn't be able to continue living without Mother. Since then, I decided to dedicate my appeal towards Mother's death to each dead character in my fiction.

Others may not be keen on occultism and parapsychology, unlike me. Well, I am not that keen as well, but for some reasons, I like mystical things. Dream, some dreams took me to the future and made me experiencing numerous *deja vu*.

I solve complicated problems in my dreams, can fly and walk through walls. Meet giants. Do things I have

never dared to do in real life. I like mystical and magical stories, and I feel those stories just like a dream.



Madness, this term can never describe the real situation accurately. Because from my life's experience, I see people who are considered mad being isolated from their environment. But where is this coming from?

How righteous are we to stick the "madness" label on them? And then after we concluded that they are mad, how can we feel like we have the right to destroy their lives by injecting them with medicines or electrocuting their brains?

Or how is it possible that nobody asks those mad people on the street, about what made them end up homeless, or what made them feel so empty about

their lives?

Sometimes, when it's not about madness, I will choose to write about those who end their lives with suicides.

Stories of people who are committing suicides are oftentimes being told with sneers and mockeries. I do not want to capture it that way, because I respect each individual's freedom of choice.

To me, suicide is like a patent-right staff who has to work for years without being allowed to come up with the relativity theory. Some people face dead-end in their lives when life is not supposed to end.

Those who do not understand this do not have the right to judge.

**The time when you read a book and finished it, and then you mumbled to yourself, "Wow, that was a good one!" – what made you say that?**

Michel: Books with hilarity, as if the writer has just tried to scream the word NO to Solomon's sayings about "There's nothing new under the sun" throughout the writing of the book. He should be a writer who gets bored easily and does not want to get stuck

with someone else's works, or even gets burdened with his previous works.

I want to find a different perspective, entering a fiction-world that seems real, even to an extreme point. As I finished reading it, I want to be made into someone new, without feeling that I have changed.

Since I have always been interested in complex and rounded character, I tend to like transgressive fictions. Works that exhibits lives' wounds. Characters that are complex and interesting usually come from an unusual background. There are a lot of unpredictable things in their daily lives. Usually, they are free-minded and witty, and probably because of that, they are gifted with more life's challenges from their writers (to not blaming God) or probably it is because of those life's challenges that they possess such witty characters.

I like works that show how witty the writer is in executing his works. To me, that's what literature has to offer. Breakthrough. Freedom.

Not being imprisoned in a certain pattern. Other things can be done in nonfiction or journalistic works. I like smart writers. They give fresh works.

The character doesn't have to be widely knowledgeable and the writer doesn't have to do name droppings. Those kinds of works are supposed to offer different things to us every time we reread them.

**Do you like writing long letters? I asked this because of the title of your novel. Are there certain memories related to writing long letters?**

Michel: Actually, it's not because I love writing letters. Rather than letters or epistolary genre, it can be said that I wrote Surat Panjang (the novel) because I like telling stories in metafictional ways. Someone delivered stories from the character "I" whose life seems like an alternate history. The character was present in the 1998 incident, knew H.B. Jassin or Yusi Avianto Pareanom that was being mentioned in the letters.

The novel Surat Panjang started as a short story I wrote as a small birthday gift for myself.

All these times, I imagined that my first novel would be published posthumously. My breath is short, although my imagination is complex, so short story is the right medium for me. Until suddenly I decided to participate in a novel-writing

competition held by Jakarta's Art Council.

Working on Surat Panjang in 18 days (to chase the competition's deadline) made me feel like bathing in freezing water during the whole process. I would not finish it without the pressure of a friend who wanted to see me winning this competition.

Finally, I became the winner. All in all, I enjoyed the process. Coincidentally, during the writing process of the novel, some friends were learning literary journalism genre. Thus, I applied narrative writing without dialogues.

Yes, I was naughty to write anonymous resources in the novel, giving birth to characters with unnamed attributions.

**How do your personal lives, backgrounds, and works influence your writings?**

Michel: All in all, I am lucky for I have always been placed in a space that fully supports my creative process. Although sometimes, just like the other late bloomers in general, oftentimes I curse each moment, "Do I have to go through this destiny because God wants me to become a



fiction writer?”

Apart from that, I grow up as someone who loves to capture moments.

I use those fictions to keep my feelings over certain moments. It soothes my wound a bit when other people do not like my works. At least, besides the fact that I only show my works specifically only to a very small circle, I know that every fiction must be special. This doesn't mean that I sneakily transfer my life stories—I do not like that impression, because in reality, I do it because I understand how to work tactically through fiction.

To me, a story will have a soul and live if, in the story, the writer plants a part of herself on a certain time or a part of the people around her.

**What about your writing process? Do you write every day? Are you the outline-type or the spontaneous-type?**

Michel: I spend more time editing rather than writing. Often I hear people making a fuss over craftsmanship in writing, a lot of people are complaining about it.

They said, writing should be from the

heart, and should not be intended as something manipulative. I guess those misguided bunch, who are fearful towards writing and editing technique, are going overboard with this.

The editing process should not make the writing becomes worse.

On the other hand, when you're editing, a writer is given a chance to see her work from another angle. There are always two sides in the creative process, just like what Peter De Vries said: “Sometimes I write drunk and revise sober, and sometimes I write sober and revise drunk. But you have to have both elements in creation — the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or spontaneity and restraint, emotion and discipline.” Anyway, this is a very famous quote and often misunderstood as a quote from Ernest Hemingway.

When it comes to the writing process itself, when I was learning at the beginning, I was very diligent in making writing outlines, along with characterization (each character has full name, family background, zodiac, as well as references on favorite and less favorite things), but all those writings never succeed. So, after that,

I decided that most of my writings do not begin with an outline.

I start my story from the first sentence. Sometimes, I only write that one sentence and just keep it for a long time.

I will only get back to it other times. Since joining the campus press, I do not write fiction every day. My time gets divided by writing nonfiction (news).

Lately, I also have to divide

my time to finish office works (editing and translating).

In essence, I do not see writing fiction as a must. And I also won't take it easy as simply a hobby.

Lately, I only have times in weekends to write and read fiction. My working days are consumed by doing research for fiction and reading nonfiction.

I don't know, one day, when I have sufficient knowledge and discipline, I may decide to write full time.

*Dewi Kharisma Michellia's stories had been published in several of Indonesia's respected newspapers, such as Koran Tempo, Jawa Pos, Jakartabeat, Media Indonesia, and many more. Some of her short stories can be downloaded here. Her novel, Surat Panjang Tentang Jarak Kita yang Jutaan Tahun Cahaya (Long Letters About Our Distance That Spans A Million Light Years) won the novel-writing competition held by Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta's Art Council) in 2012.*



# ELIA BINTANG

*on beliefs, beach, and butterflies*

Why beach? And why butterflies?

Elia: It's a very simple story. A girl meets a guy in a strange, faraway, almost mythical place called Butterfly Beach (*Pantai Kupu-kupu*). She is in search of the purpose of her life. He is in search of the love of his life. In Butterfly Beach, every morning, the sun rises with millions of butterflies flying out of it. That's the general

idea.

Why beach?

Because it's a perfect setting for the characters. Imagine that you're sick of the way you've lived so far, and decide to think about what it is that you want, why do you exist, and stuff like that. Imagine that you are into the alternative way of living (and

thinking) because the accepted way sucks. If you stay in the city, you'll feel very much alienated. If you go to the mountains, you must be full of hatred.

This is not a story about alienation nor hatred.

There might be a subtle feeling of alienation throughout the book—I can't put that out of the picture—but it has a certain quality of warmth, as well. A certain quality of fun—and a relaxed attitude. You're serious, but not so serious at the same time. So, the beach is a necessity.

As for the butterflies, no particular reason. Maybe because they're beautiful (just think about millions of them coming out of the sun). The main character has a rainbow-colored butterfly tattoo, too. She, as well as the guy, is a part of the Rainbow Community. It's inspired by the Rainbow Family of Living Light in real life, a community that embraces the alternative way of living. I choose butterflies more for artistic reasons, I guess.


### How and where do you write?

Elia: When I'm working on a novel, I write for eight hours every day. I

write anything that comes to mind for the first draft. After that, I review it, analyze it, make an outline, and begin the second draft. I review and analyze it again, decide on which parts that are inefficient and should be left out; and what I should do to improve the story and the writing. Then I begin the third draft.

If everything goes well, it's all that it takes. But sometimes, it takes more.

I write anywhere. I've written in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bali. All I need is a quiet, peaceful room with a closed door. And cigarettes. And cups of coffee. A beer, occasionally. Whiskey. Songs that take me somewhere else. Magic mushroom would be nice, as well, for fresh new ideas and perspectives.

 **You're a musician, as well. What is it that music can't do, that writing can do, or vice versa? How do these two influence each other?**

Elia: A song is a sword. A novel is a slow knife. If you want to die, get the first one. If you want to understand pain, get the second one. You will die, too, in the end, but as a deeper, wiser, more complete person.

My music doesn't influence my




writing. My taste of music does.

I like Radiohead, Sigur Ros, Massive Attack, Isaac Delusion, stuff like that. Their songs set my mood right when I'm writing surrealistic things, which is an important aspect of my work besides freedom and counterculture. They stimulate my senses and imagination.

ourselves. All the characters in Pantai Kupu-kupu define themselves, or in the process of defining themselves.

I support equality between men and women. I'm not talking about the difference in salaries they make at work or the numbers of men and women in the parliament or stuff like that. I'm talking about the mindset.

*"Women are free individuals and shouldn't give a shit about the pressure society put on them."*

 I believe that our writings or stories reflect our fears, dreams, wishes, concerns, belief—or a combination of all those. How do you see Pantai Kupu-kupu reflects yours?

Elia: It reflects my concerns and belief quite a lot. I believe that we should live this life as subjects, not objects to labels, stereotypes, norms, values, and anything created by society.

We have responsibilities towards other people, of course, but we are individuals at the same time. We are free.

It's up to us—how to live and define

Women shouldn't be afraid of anything. Women are free individuals and shouldn't give a shit about the pressure society put on them; it's how the society sees them that has to change. Women shouldn't live their lives expecting to rely on men financially and emotionally; because they are better than that, and are capable human beings—besides, men don't owe women anything, we are all equal.

All the female characters in Pantai Kupu-kupu are free individuals with good self-image and self-esteem.

Today's culture was shaped by the generations before us. What kind of

culture will we pass on to the next generations? It's not the time to write about weak, fragile women and the superiority of men.

**I sense several issues related to interconnectedness, finding oneself, and spirituality in this novel. How do you—yourself, as Elia—see these issues?**

Elia: You pray to the 'higher' being every night and day. Then things work out as you asked. You say, my prayer is answered. Then things don't work out. You say, my prayer is not answered. How do you see that?

I'd say, it's just the nature of life.

Even if you pray to a tree, the outcome would be the same: sometimes you get good things, other times you get bad things. Based on this argument alone, I see no point in being too spiritual. I believe the existence of spirits, but that's it. I never discuss anything beyond that in my writing because my purpose is to emphasize the absurdity of life and the surrealistic things you can experience, not the spirituality itself.

I'm a non-believer and I think life is absurd. You can live all your life as a good person and die in a traffic

accident or a bombing. You can be a bad person, kill millions of people, live a long life, and some people suggest to make you a national hero after you die. One phenomenon could occur just because it 'felt' like occurring.

I don't believe in interconnectedness.

About finding oneself, I always think that self-knowledge is important; and that in life, it's much more important to be than to have. Do everything your way. Succeed your way, fail your way, and in that, you will find yourself. The logic is very simple. When you're being you in every decision you make, self-discovery is inevitable.

**What's the most difficult writing days in your life look like?**



Elia: Writing is not difficult. Thinking of what to write is.

I always have a big picture in my head before I work on a story. I know how it's going to be like, how the main characters look like, what are their strengths and weaknesses, their clothing style, how they move, how they become who they are, what they want, and so on. If you know all these before you write, it's easy.

Writer's block is a myth.

I don't remember anything so unbearable about my writing process.

*Elia Bintang had just launched his first novel, *Pantai Kupu-kupu (Butterfly Beach)*, published by Plot Point. He is also an avid blogger who writes at Jurnal Elia and a singer/musician. Albert Camus, Haruki Murakami, and Jean-Paul Sartre are some of his major influencers. He is now living in Bali, Indonesia.*



# MAESY ANG & TEDDY KUSUMA

*on journeys, distance, and friendship*

“What’s the biggest challenge in writing a book together?”

Maesy & Teddy: The biggest challenge was to begin.

Although we have blogged together in The Dusty Sneakers for five years, writing a book together required us to work much closer together. We’ve always known that our creative

processes are different, but we never clashed until we started working on the book.

Teddy is a true blue artist; he writes when he wants to write.

He doesn’t even need to know what the story is, he just needs some jazz and coffee to accompany him as he types away until the story reveals



itself.

Maesy is the exact opposite. She could only write when she knows exactly what she wants to say and how she wants to say it. She needs to know the big picture and the small details, so she spends a lot of time plotting and brainstorming in her notebook before she could open her laptop and write.


So when we started, Teddy felt constrained by Maesy's questions and planning, while Maesy got frustrated over Teddy's push to write impulsively. In the end, we resolved it by playing to each other's strengths.

For a week, Teddy was left to write the prologue to set the tone of the book, while Maesy thought, researched, and planned. Then Maesy brewed a huge pot of kokos ananas tea, brought out a stack of colorful post-its, and facilitated a two-hour workshop for Teddy and herself, which resulted in an outline for the whole book.

At the end of the week, we had everything we needed to start writing. Maesy loved how Teddy's prologue set up the tone for the book, while Teddy was amazed by the fact that he could just glance at a wall with color-coded post-its to see all the plans for

every chapter in the book as well as how they are linked with one another.

It was smooth sailing afterward, as each of us was free to work as we liked and find that our different approaches complement each other.

 **What's your idea of a “perfect journey”?**

Teddy: To me, a “perfect journey” is one that touches you on a personal level. You know, the kind that has elements that you'd remember for a very long time. A trip filled with warm conversations with a close friend, one that reminded you of a significant moment from your past, or sometimes, a small random gesture of kindness, like when we were on a train in Japan, an old lady gave Maesy and I a panda origami she just made.

Mostly though, a journey is perfect when shared with a loved one.

One of my most vivid memories is a bumpy bus ride that Maesy and I shared in South India. We've been going our separate ways for more than a year before spending 14 days together in India, so I was missing her quite a lot. Maesy was sitting next to me, her face green from carsickness and she was about to fall asleep. It was

just a bus ride, but I remember it vividly.

Maesy: I agree with Teddy, but to add a very practical dimension, a perfect journey is one where I could be completely unplugged. When I can roam without any Internet connection, it means that I am not traveling for work and that I travel with Teddy. There is no one I need to keep in touch with, nothing is urgent and no screen is competing with my surroundings for my attention. It feels very liberating, being unplugged.

### What's the life-story of this book?

Maesy & Teddy: Like the story within, the backstory of the book also took place in several different places.

The idea first came to life under the coconut trees in Sekotong, Lombok. Maesy was recovering from a serious case of respiratory problems and Teddy has his first break after a long, intense period at his office.

We spent four days swimming,

sleeping, sunbathing, and reflecting on what we felt missing in our lives. As much as we love our jobs, we felt that a creative spark was missing, a spark that only writing and traveling could fulfill.

We started reminiscing about all the life lessons we found through traveling and found that mostly came from the period when we first started the blog when Maesy got a scholarship to study in the Netherlands and we each traveled on our own.

We thought that these stories are best told in a longer narrative format than what we usually do in the blog, so that was the first spark of an idea for a book.

It seemed that the universe was listening, for Noura Books contacted us right after we returned from Sekotong. Noura Books found our blog and asked whether we'd like to write a book, so of course, we said yes.

What serendipity!

*"A perfect journey is one where I could be completely unplugged. When I can roam without any Internet connection."*

After we came up with an outline, we went for a four-day retreat to Portibi Farms, an organic farm in Cicurug, West Java. We took enough breaks between writing to hike and swim in a waterfall, bake bread, help out in the farm, and play Twister with the children of Portibi's owners.

That proved to be a winning combo, for we drafted half of the book during the retreat! Perhaps also because we happened to stay in a room called "The Librarian", another serendipity.

But mostly, the book was brought to life in Jakarta. In the weekday evenings, where Teddy stayed at work after everyone had left to write. In the weekend mornings, where a sleepy Maesy would brew pots and pots of tea-rooibos, Darjeeling, and haji cha—to accompany her to write.

As much as we love traveling, the ultimate magic is finding the wonder in everyday life in our hometown.

Jakarta is home for us, and it is at home we saw the book came together—a truly magical experience for us.

**What do you like the most about each other's style in writing?**

Teddy: The way Maesy writes reflects

a happy, sweet, quirky, and intelligent personality – just like she is in real life.

She has a way to reflect on and synthesize her encounters into a meaningful story. When she wrote about the dark side of fairy tales, she could draw the similarities between fairy tales and the tales told about Indonesia as a nation. Behind the beautiful story of Indonesia as a prosperous, united, and friendly nation, there is underlying darkness of inequalities and intolerance.

For me, home is where I was born, Denpasar. I was intrigued when Maesy explores the idea of a home so far away from her own – in Taipei, in Amsterdam, and Den Haag. I found myself thinking about the way she sees things far after I was done reading her chapters.

Maesy: Teddy writes with his heart on his sleeve. You can tell exactly how he feels about something through his writing.

In the chapter he wrote about the unpleasant consequences of tourism in Bali, you could see how upset he was although it was written in a mild tone. You could tell how much he loves his odd friend, Arip Syaman,

although the chapters with Arip in them are full of silly incidents and humor.

You could sense his agitation when he questioned the call to preserve tradition during his trip to Baduy. Reading Teddy's writing feels very intimate because he lets you know how he feels, in the most charming use of Bahasa Indonesia.

**What kind of travel stories are your favorites? And why?**

Maesy & Teddy: We grew up reading fiction and folktales. We find that characters matter the most in any story, so we love travel stories with strong characters.

We care much less about a place, we keep on reading because we want to know the characters better and get to know a place through their eyes.

Maesy grew up reading fantasy books, and in those books, traveling is how a character becomes aware of their personalities and grows as a person. Lyra Belacqua in Phillip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy is bold and mischievous when the story started, but it was only when she traveled to the North Pole she understands that being brave also entails sacrifice and

thinking of the consequences of her actions.

We love travel stories that are also stories of personal journeys, one in which the narrator finds something meaningful about him/herself.

We also enjoy Agustinus Wibowo's Titik Nol. It is ultimately a story of humanity, seen in people he met throughout his travels, those whom he held dear, and also within himself. These are the kind of stories that will last in our mind.



**You talk about friendship and distance in your book, and how you're bridging that gap through letters. In your personal life, what are the significance of friendship, distance, and letters to you?**

Teddy: I started writing letters to



friends before the dawn of e-mails. My best friend in high school went to university in Yogyakarta while I studied in Jakarta and we decided to keep in touch by writing letters.

Those letters to me were not just a way to connect with my friends, they were also a way for me to connect with myself. I only wrote my most significant thoughts and events that left the deepest prints in those letters.

How I write my letters became my habit in writing anything personally—be it blog posts or the book.

Maesy: The book (*Kisah Kawan di Ujung Sana*) was about the period when Teddy was my friend at the

other end of the world, while I studied in the Netherlands and formed new friendships.

These friends are now my soul sisters at the other end of the world—in Brussels, Managua, and Vienna.

While we stay in touch through Facebook, Whatsapp, and Instagram, it is only when we took the time to write long letters that I really could connect with them beneath the surface and see our friendship grow.

It is only when I write long letters that I feel the distance shrink. It is when I read their letters I believe that life is long and the world is small, that our paths will cross some other time.

*Maesy Ang and Teddy W. Kusuma wrote about their traveling journeys in the book *Kisah Kawan di Ujung Sana (A Story of A Friend On The Other End)*, published by Noura Books in 2014. Both can also be found typing away on their travel blog, *The Dusty Sneakers* or hosting pop-up stores and creative events at POST Pasar Santa, Jakarta.*



# WINDRY RAMADHINA

*on characters, choices, and chronicles*

**Where do your characters come from?**

Windry: Every time I write, I start with a conflict.

Other elements, including characters, are born from there. Certain characters are only suitable for a certain conflict in a certain story. Thus, each character is unique.

A character becomes unique when we get to know him/her well enough.

I am imagining that my characters are alive, just like us. They have a certain tone of voice, a certain way of thinking, as well as certain values—that are predetermined by the things they've experienced in their lives. They have background stories. And I have to know them all.

I even need to know what's in their closet, what's in their fridge, or how they look at someone who is meaningful to them, or what they would do if they were bored, or who they hang out with on a Saturday night. It's a long list.

Often, sketches help me. The more I know my characters, the more I get to know what to write about them.

Sometimes I also look at the people around me and borrow their characters for a novel. Rayyi's friends in Montase (the novel), for instance. They are my real friends (in real life). This is an easier way to go, but it's not a done deal that we can always find a real-life model that suits our story.

**What does your choice of characters tell us about who you are, your dreams, your fears, yourself?**

Windry: My readers could easily recognize me through my characters. Each one of them is a part of me. I'm like a tiny jar full of various kinds of candies. When I write, I take one candy to be thrown into the story. The candy is me—who wants to be a photographer. Or myself—who believes that rain falls carrying angels. Or myself—who is afraid to get hurt because of love.

To me, writing is an expression. Either consciously or subconsciously, I guess I always show the real me to my readers. Through a story. Through the world, I write. Through my characters.

I need to write honestly, by being who I am. Because I am not writing to be 'liked'. I write what I like so I can find readers who like the same things as I do.

**How do your childhood upbringing and the people you know affect the way you choose your characters?**

Windry: In my family, I was raised with such discipline, it was pretty tough. I was taught to be independent, not to rely too much on other people. And I do not have many siblings. I have a little brother who is close to me—we're like best friends. But most of the times I am all by myself because on many occasions, we're living in different cities.

So it should not be surprising if most of my characters are strong, ambitious woman who find it difficult to compromise. They are perfectionist, cynical, and tends to appear cold. I am not really into weak characters; the way I do not wish to see myself as a weak person.



I grew up influenced by Japanese pop-culture. There were times when I read more manga than novels. Shounen manga, especially Naoki Urasawa's, made me fall for witty, dominant, and complex characters.

Only after I got acquainted with Ichikawa Takuji's novels, I learned to like sweet and sloppy characters, who make insignificant mistakes, something we can laugh at. I learned to have fun with them.

**What do you find interesting about people?**

Windry: I believe that everybody has a story. I like watching them, and then asking myself, who are they? What are they like in their daily lives? How do they live their lives? And in the end, I start to create some scenarios that—I think—might happened to them.

At other times they let out certain expressions, or do something I don't normally do, or talk about things I just knew, or wear—for instance—a kind of hat I rarely see. Usually, these are the things that pique my imagination. But in essence, all I need to do is asking questions.

**What's your definition of a strong character in a story? Who is your favorite protagonist and antagonist from a book?**

Windry: A strong character can make the readers feel their presence; their presence affect the readers; something that is long stored in your memories. Such characters must be created wholly. They need to be just like us, with multiple sides and complexities.

Each time we're talking about protagonist and antagonist, I want to distance myself away from the trap of good-and-evil or right-or-wrong. I like 'grey' characters more.

I like imperfect protagonists, with weaknesses of their own, that gives me a chance to get annoyed at them from time to time. And I always want to find antagonists who would make me fall in love, who would grab my sympathy.



*"We're not always on the same page about everything, but I think most of who I am comes from my mother."*

One of my favorite protagonists is Sophie Kinsella's Rebecca Bloomwood. She is not trying to be perfect, at all. She is what she is. Just like Agatha Christie's Arthur Hastings. And both are funny—in their ways. They offer themselves to be laughed at.

Sometimes, when I read, I just want to laugh and have a good time.

My favorite antagonist most probably is Johan Liebert from the manga *Monster* by Naoki Urasawa. A handsome (if not pretty), smart, and cold murderer. But what makes me fall for him is that he's hurting. He's hurting so deep; to an extent that the readers won't be able to hate him.

**If you can pick one real character from your personal life, someone who has changed the way you look at things, who will this be?**

Windry: My mother. She passes along the things she loves to me. Books, language, traveling. I got my first book from her. I fall for words and

languages because of her. I went on many traveling journeys with her. And she taught me things that define who I am, until today.

We're not always on the same page about everything, but I think most of who I am comes from my mother.

Since I was a kid, most of the times, my mother is not at home. She is not ambitious, but she is always so lucky when it comes to working. And basically, she's not the type who'd like to stay at home. She is sharp and independent, and a bit nonchalant. If we're traveling in a group, she'll separate herself and discreetly slip away.

Sometimes I ask myself if my writings talk about me—or my mother.

Windry Ramadhina is the writer of *Orange* (2008), *Metropolis* (2009), *Memori* (2012), *Montase* (2012), *London* (2013), *Interlude* (2014), and *Walking After You* (2014). She was nominated twice in Indonesia's Khatulistiwa Literary Award.



# GRATIAGUSTI C. ROMPAS

*on fireworks, sunflowers, and metaphors*

**The book, *This City is Fireworks* (Kota Ini Kembang Api): why city—and why fireworks?**

Anya: I was born and have lived almost all my life in Jakarta. It is a city where I have felt a broad spectrum of emotions: from hurt to joy, sorrow to enthusiasm, rage to being loved, losing hope to believing in simple things. I think a person is more or less

molded not only by their experiences but also where he or she spends most of their time. This helps create one's reality and, in my case, it is an important ingredient in my poetry.

I am always drawn into lights of any kind since I can remember. Study lamp, street lights, fairy lights around a Christmas tree, the light coming from behind the curtain of a window,

even the light coming out of a laptop or computer screen. However, I also realize that if there is light, there must be darkness.

So I feel it is just natural for me to use fireworks as a representation of the coming and going of light and dark, which then become an experimental tool to explore a city's inhabitants. You may not find many references to fireworks though in this collection. The phrase "Kota Ini Kembang Api" is not even a title of a poem, instead, it is taken from a line in an untitled poem. To me, the swift changing from darkness to brightness that fireworks cause serves as symbol and metaphor. That is why I chose it as the collection's title.

And when I wrote the other poems, I kept in mind to associate how swift the day lapses with the contrast and irony between the city lights and its shadowy crevices to describe whatever emotion or event I wanted to talk about. When the collection was finally finished, I realized that my days went by more like a spiral than the linear concept.

**Why poetry? Why not novels, or short stories?**

Anya: When I was still in elementary

school, I wrote short stories in one of my AA books so it did not attract the attention of my teacher, and distributed it around my class so my friends could read whatever I had written in it. And all my life I have always enjoyed reading novels or short story collections. One of my not many attempts at writing a short story even made its way to a collection published by the Jakarta Arts Council many years ago.

But when I started writing poetry (for an assignment when I was in junior high) I realized poetry is a format that fitted like a glove for me to express myself. No matter how long or short a poem is, every single word has to be significant. Not that novels or short stories do not have this trait. It is just poetry fits how my mind works. Jagged, fleeting, tumultuous. I feel there are so many ways for me to express them through poetry compared to other forms.

I guess I just have to live with the fact that I am not an all-rounder writer.

**Can anyone write poetry? Can anyone be a poet?**

Anya: As a co-founder of Komunitas BungaMatahari (better known as BuMa), a poetry community that has

lived by its motto “Semua Bisa Berpuisi” (or, roughly translated, “Poetry for All”), I absolutely believe that anyone can enjoy, respect, understand, read and, of course, write poetry. I have seen this happen many times with my own eyes through various activities that BuMa organized or was part of. Many people from many walks of life were so keen on the idea of poetry. And this proved the popular belief that poetry was a difficult art form was not entirely correct.

I do believe, though, that if one aspires to make poetry his or her art, one should understand that poetry is a discipline with a long history. So one must educate oneself at least about other poets and what they have done as well as why they did what they did. This will help one to find one’s voice and what one wants to say through one’s art.

And if one wants to write, one better reads too.

Reading is good not only to widen one’s knowledge but also sharpen one’s analytical skill. Any writer should have this, I think, so he or she can give a better judgment about his or her works before anyone else does. This, in turn, will make him or her

more critical to any form of art he or she is consuming.



I am sorry if I sound too patronizing. But I believe one has to respect one’s art as well as other people’s. And then all you have to do is add a little bit fun and some love to your poetic journey.

### How should one read poetry?

Anya: When I was in university, my poetry lecturer said that poetry was meant to make a poet’s ideas or emotions concrete, not to make it unclear for the readers. But sometimes poets like to play too, break some rules, adding purposeful puzzles into their works. Just like writing, reading is a skill to be learned. So you can spot those “mischiefs” and decide for yourself



whether they add meaning to the poet's works or otherwise.

I believe in successful and unsuccessful poems. Again, to decide which one a poem is, you need your analytical and critical skills. Learning these skills will depend on, amongst others, what kind of literary diet you are consuming and your view of life.

that is in them. Oftentimes I feel like something is wrong and/or confusing and/or unrecognizable going on and I cannot stop it. On a good day, lines come across my mind and I can unleash them just by opening my laptop and typing them. On a bad day, I cannot write a single thing. On an okay day, I can write a few lines but then nothing. A poem in "Kota Ini

*"On a bad day, I cannot write a single thing. On an okay day, I can write a few lines but then nothing."*

I notice many people choose to see poetry as only a pile of emotions that came to a poet almost magically.

Well, indeed, one of the first signs that a poem might—underline might—be successful is how it touches and connects with its readers. True but debatable. And we have not even talked about taste and its politics!

However, the answer to this entire conundrum is quite simple: read, read, and read.

**What's going on inside of you before, during, and after poetry is born?**

Any: Poetry is my way to understand my head and heart and all the stuff

Kembang Api" took me four years to finish.

When I am writing, I focus on the stuff I said above. It is like watching your laundry spinning in your washing machine and then grabbing that one shirt you have been concentrating on (impossible in real life, I know). I also pick on associations that appear—like memories, visuals, voices, smells—and try to incorporate them in my writing. However, this happens more organically than it sounds.

After finishing the first draft of a poem, I will give it a once-over so I can trim unnecessary words, or



change them, fix illogical lines, etc. I will only stop when I feel I cannot mess around with it anymore. It will also be the moment when I can begin to understand what kind of shirt I have fished, its fabric, stitching, size, and fit. In other words, this is the moment of truth: have I used all the right literary tools and techniques and make them work or not.

**Can you tell us more about the creation process behind the lines**

## **of Kota Ini Kembang Api?**

Anya: All the poems in “Kota Ini Kembang Api” have been arranged in a certain order so that readers can read them as a book-long story. Yet, readers can also enjoy them individually as well as start or end at any page of the book and hopefully still find them enjoyable. So, for me, each of them serves its purpose. Like a string of pearls that I can claim as my necklace.

**Gratiagusti Chananya Rompas (Anya)**

*is the co-founder of a poet community, Komunitas Bunga Matahari (Sunflower Community). Her poems had been published in Kompas daily, Spice! magazine, and the anthology “Bisikan Kata Teriakan Kota” by Jakarta Arts Council, and “Dian Sastro for President! #2 Reloaded” by Yogyakarta Cultural Academy. She graduated from the University of Indonesia majoring in English Literature and got her Master’s Degree in The Gothic Imagination from the University of Stirling, Scotland. Her anthology, Kota Ini Kembang Api (This City Is Fireworks) is republished by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2016.*



# THEORESIA RUMTHE

*on embracing wildness*

**How do you give birth to poetry?**

Theo: Poetry is born out of the most mundane things inside of me. If you asked me how the process looks like: I love to observe. I love to observe the smallest things around me, for instance the green grass, the dried leaves with their textures when I stepped on them, a droplet of water

from the tree trunks that falls on my skin, raindrops crawling on the window, the glimmer of lights from the car's headlights when it's dark, and the eyelids of a lover. I love to observe these things closely, slowly. Once I observed them, I connect them to the feelings inside of me. The next step is to pour them on into a piece of paper.

**How does ‘the wildest place on earth’ look like?**

Theo: The ‘wildest place on earth’, in my opinion, is inside our head. There’s a limitless world in there. If I need to give meanings to the word ‘wild’, then I would perceive it as an ‘adventure of feelings’—of how courageous we are in exploring every feeling inside of us, whatever those feelings are, bravely. When I thought of the word ‘wild’, I have this memory when I was twelve or thirteen: I sneaked out of the house only to watch midnight-movie in the cinema, without asking permission to my parents. (laugh)

Something that is more ‘raw’, more ‘matter-of-factly’, more ‘honest’ has its wildness. And that resides inside of me.

**How do we find poetry?**

Theo: I believe that inspiration can nudge whomever it visits. The problem is, who would be sensitive towards that, and who would not. When you get nudged and you’re indifferent, inspiration will find someone else.

So, if you’d like to find poetry around you, there’s only one key: don’t be indifferent.

*"The ‘wildest place on earth’, in my opinion, is inside our head. There’s a limitless world in there."*

**What kind of ‘wildness’ runs inside of you?**

Theo: I like things that hit me first. Whether they are sentences that come first or feelings that come for the first time. I do not like to edit them. Something ‘raw’ is usually way more honest. This is the reason why I never edited my poetry, except when it comes to the choice of words.

Poetry is not always about words. We can see this from the way the Universe create poetry; could be from the rainbow, the colors of sundown, the breeze that caresses your face, salty sea that sticks to your skin, the traces of sand on the sole of your feet.

**How does your birthplace influence your works and the way you see the world?**

Theo: Ambon, my birthplace, significantly influences my works, the way I see the world, and my creative process. My Mother and Father had introduced me to ‘the stage’ when I was young. I grew up with two sisters, and we love singing since early childhood. Not only singing, but also reading poetry, and we’re quite friendly with the stage since we’re playing amateurish drama and theatre. My Mother and Father also introduced us to books. I remembered that I already composed my first short story when I was a teenager, although it remained unfinished until today.



The exotic natural landscape of Ambon also gives a stimulus for me, who grew up there, to create. I don’t know, but I feel as if the ocean is not only blue, but there’s a richer

gradation of colors. And the mountains are not always green. They can have hues of salted egg. There, I learned to see all the possibilities amid all impossibilities.

**How do you stay true to your art, to the creative force inside of you?**

Theo: Do you create poetry every day? If this question is posed to me right now, then the answer is yes—because I am preparing my next poetry book. But, sometimes, for a long time, I don’t create poetry.

What’s important for me is to give birth to creative works, and this should be done every single day. If I don’t make poetry, I write for my blog. If I don’t write for my blog, I write whatever sentences that come to mind in a small notebook I carry around, or on my mobile phone’s note page. If I am negligent about this, I feel anxious and restless.

I choose to stay true to the art and creativity inside of me. I think it’s simply about making your choices. My ‘fire’ won’t go far from art and creativity. To live and to choose to lit your fire consciously and fully, I look at it as an achievement in life. The most important thing from lighting your fire is to do it wholeheartedly,

instead of doing it only to look ‘cool’.

So you won’t regret the day you die.

*Theoresia Rumthe co-authors the poetry book *Tempat Paling Liar di Muka Bumi* (The Wildest Place on Earth, 2017) with her partner, Weslly Johannes. Theo was born in Ambon and currently lives in Bandung, writing and facilitating workshops on poetry making and public speaking. She is also one of the initiators of the Molucca Project, an effort to bring some good vibes about her home town in Maluku (Molucca).*





# BERNARD BATUBARA

*on stories, love, and heartbreaks*

**How does Bara—the writer—see love and heartbreak in his writings?**

Bara: My first novel draft was a love story. I wrote it when I was in junior high school. It was about the life of rebellious high school student and a love story that blossoms with a classmate. A cliché, I know. Like a template. But it was only this kind of

stories that crossed my mind the first time I tried to write a novel. The draft was completed in 2 years.

I sent it to a big publishing company in Jakarta and got a rejection letter 6 months after.

At first, love-themed stories (and heartbreak; these two are a unit; each

one can't be written on their own) became the fuel for my writing. Simply because I felt that these stories were the ones closest to me. It was a theme I thought I understood the most. I wanted to write fantasy like Harry Potter novels, but all the monsters I could imagine already made their appearances there. I felt less imaginative to write fantasy and I didn't read enough to write a historical novel. So, I wrote romance.



As time passed by, with 2-3 of my books were still talking about love, my readers (generally they are younger than me) labeled me: Bernard Batubara—the romance writer.

I started to be known (or seen) as a romantic guy because I write love stories. There was one time when I tried to ditch the label because it felt like I have been somewhat dwarfed by the market. I do possess other interests apart from writing love stories. However, now I accept it and think of that label (the romance writer) as a good opportunity to deliver various ideas outside my ideals about love itself.

My other books, although the 'outer packaging' is still revolving around

love, are talking about a wide array of issues. I talk about illegal logging, horizontal conflict, social condition, law, modernism, urban living, existentialism, religion, and many more. Love stories are used as packaging, a prelude to my ideas.

One of the heaviest tasks for a writer is to make the reader feels connected to what he writes. Love (and heartbreak) story is the easiest material to get people to resonate with it. I use love stories as a bridge to talk about other things with my readers.

**How far do you process real-life experience into fiction?**

Bara: At first, I thought one of the most important skills a writer should

possess is imagination. Writing is about creating things that once did not exist. That's the joy of writing.

Anger, disappointment, sadness, all the negative feelings that surface when I remember certain parts of my

*"The first step to remember is by reminiscing the most important part of my experience."*

However, lately, I feel as if I am not too clever in making things up. It's easier for me to write about the things I have experienced.

I don't need to find the scenes, characters, or situations that don't exist. I need only to daydream for a while, remembering a situation or a scene from my past, then write about it.

Easy.

But of course, it's not always easy to write about your personal experience. There were times when I didn't want to remember the things I needed to remember. I want to write about the things I have experienced, but I don't want to write them all.

However, censoring my memory means betrayal to memories itself.

At the end of the day, I just face it.

memories... I learn about them. I dissect my memories. I ask myself why it happened this way or that way, to the point in which I can digest those negative feelings and understand them; while turning them into stories.

The first step to remember is by reminiscing the most important part of my experience. For example, if I am writing a love story based on my experience with my ex, I will remember the most impressive moment of our relationships. Usually, that part contains a conflict, and this becomes a conflict in the story as well. I will start writing them down. From here, I can move to many different directions. I can go forward, or backward to past experiences until those memories turn into a full write-up.

How far do I go?

Radio Galau FM—almost all of it is

based on my personal experience. Kata Hati only takes some ideas and conversations that happen in the real world. Cinta dengan Titik is about someone else's experience (my friend). Milana, part of it is a personal experience, and the other part is not. And there it goes. I am most straightforward in my latest book, Luka Dalam Bara. In some of my social media channels and talk shows, I told my readers that the book recorded my romantic experience with someone (most of them knows who this someone is).

**Someone says, write only for one person. Do you agree with this?**

Bara: I would say that I am quite in agreement with that suggestion. It reminded me of one of my favorite writer's advice, Kurt Vonnegut. He said, write to please just one person. "If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia."

Another favorite writer of mine, whose name I do not wish to mention here, once said that he writes only for one person: himself. I think I have done the same thing, writing only to please myself, and I did it because it's easier than pleasing everybody. (Everybody means 7 billion people on

earth? Scary)

**All stories are love stories. How do you feel about this? Is this something you believe in?**

Bara: Yes and no.

No, because there are good stories I have read, and the writer does not write about romance at all. Some good stories talk about war, violence, political intrigue, glum future world, and many more. Good stories are not always about love.

However, I think even in those stories where love-themes are avoided, at a certain point they will indirectly tell us something about love. Love becomes something subtle and inherent in the story of life, and this—at times, enables us to see love stories in novels that don't fall under the romance genre. When I read 1984 by George Orwell, I read a love story between the protagonist and his female partner, although Orwell might want to tell a story about the forlorn future of humans.

All stories are love stories—this could be true for the previous reason: love is something inherent in life and it takes different shapes. We're not only talking about eros love or platonic

love but many different kinds of love. Just like it is impossible to write a story without a mention of human sufferings, it is also impossible to avoid bringing forth a love story, however subtle, in a story.

**As a writer, how do you see the difference between your male and female characters when they fall in love or heartbroken?**

Bara: Male characters in fiction works I've ever read face their broken-heartedness in a way that is not too different from my male friends in the real world. First, they will deny it. Second, they find distractions. Third, they regret the things they have done. Fourth, they know they can't turn back time, so they'll enter the next step. Fifth, they accept the fact that they are the real problem in that broken relationship.

The same goes for female characters. They'll weep, mourn until their tears dry up, and in no time they find someone new to love.

I guess because fiction is a reflection and a result of contemplation of real-world events, the characters' actions would not be that far different from what we have seen in the real world. These are also the things that make us

feel connected to a novel or short story we are reading. We feel as if we are seeing ourselves (or our friends) in it.

**How is your attachment to your works? How do you deal with compliments and criticisms?**

Bara: I would think of myself as a writer that could move on easily when it comes to my work.

At the time a new book is being published, I no longer think about it. I am already focusing my mind on the next one. Sometimes, during talk shows, there were questions from readers about certain scenes in my book—and I had to dig my mind hard to answer that—since I had detached myself quite far from that work.

I used to think of my published books as my children. In that sense, our relationship is like this blood-connection between a father and his children.

But then, I thought, a good father could be one who lets his children grow independently and find their ways to face the world. Furthermore, the world the children are facing in their world—a world that is different from the world of their father.



My attachment towards my published works is limited to a chronological memory. Which book, published by when, or how I began writing that book... those kinds of things. But when it comes to emotional attachment or the like, I don't think I have that kind of feelings inside of me.

I do not have enough energy to cultivating an emotional relationship with all of my works. Life moves forward and I invest my energy on my future works.

And speaking about criticism, I was once annoyed with the mocking of my works in social media. However, afterward, I realized that being annoyed had no benefit for me.

So, that was it.

Today, I think of all the responses of my work as appreciations. I only take into account inputs from people whose reading taste and thinking ability I trust. The rest are just different forms of appreciation.

*Bernard Batubara (Bara) is an Indonesian author living in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He begins his writing career as a poet. Today, his works have been published in newspapers, literary magazines, literary web portals, as well as several anthologies with fellow authors. His books are Angsa-Angsa Ketapang (2010), Radio Galau FM (2011), Kata Hati (2012), Milana (2013), Cinta. (2013), Surat untuk Ruth (2014), Jatuh Cinta Adalah Cara Terbaik untuk Bunuh Diri (2014), Jika Aku Milikmu (2015), Metafora Padma (2016), Elegi Rinaldo (2016), and Luka Dalam Bara (2017). Radio Galau FM and Kata Hati are now major motion pictures. He occasionally gives a lecture on creative writing in high schools, universities, and communities.*



# LLIA HALIMATUSSADIAH

*on productivity & being committed to writing*

“What is your view about productivity, discipline, and inspiration?”

Llia: I’m not productive, I just have a lot of things to say. The abundance of my curiosity and energy has led me into a series of learning, from books, classes, workshops, people, situations. And every time I learn something

new, I just have to share it. It can be in the form of social media posts, writing books, podcasts, and videos. Inspiration comes when you’re living with a sense of awe and wonder of the world, just being aware of the present moment. It’s so natural when you’re in the state of accepting, receiving and allowing, you’ll get inspirations. I meditate every

morning and night for at least 20 minutes, being still helps me a lot to be in coherence mode, and the effect of calmness inside will last for hours.

Once you've decided to create something big, for example, a long book, then inspirations alone are not enough. You will need a plan to keep you accountable for your commitment. You need a structure. You need to be disciplined.

I always said, structure before substance. Create outlines first, then pour your heart into it. I am proud to be able to be balanced (most of the time!), balancing my yin and yang, masculine and feminine energy that governs creation.

### **Do you have a writing routine?**

Llia: I write a gratitude journal every morning, writing the evidence of the things that work well in my life based on my intention.

For writing as in book project, I also do it first thing in the morning usually from 7 to 9 am, then I'll get ready to go to the office. I am not writing full time, but my job as CMO at my own startup, Storial.co allows me to have words, a big part of my life.

### **How do you manage a writing project? How do you organize your thoughts, your resources, and your time?**

Llia: When I get inspired to write a book, it usually because I'm curious about a subject and I have spent enough amount of research that already benefits my life that I'd like to share with others. So I started a project with a clearly articulated objective, what the impact the book would make to the world when it's done.

Then I would create a mind map to see how the book outlines would look like from start to finish. Then I'll set the book launch date and count down from that date to figure out my researching time, my total writing time, my first draft, my proofreading time, my editing time, to my final draft. Then I'll usually figure out from that schedule, how many pages per day I should write to be able to reach the goal on time. If I have to write 3 pages a day and I skip one day, then the next day my goal would be doubled.

When I'm writing a book project, usually my mind is fully occupied with my project, so I'm focusing on my energy and time to my writing

project 'til I finished at least the first draft.

**You are writing different types of books: novels, poems, guide book, self-help, travel book, spiritual, movie script, etc. Why? How do you want people to remember you or your work as a writer?**

Llia: I'm bored if I'm doing the same thing over and over, I like some challenges when I do my work, that's why when writing gets a bit too easy for me, I add the challenge by writing books in different subjects. The latest and heaviest challenge would be writing a biography book of entrepreneurs' stories. The difficulty level is so much higher because I need to dive deep into another person's life and become them for some time. It's tough!

I want to be remembered as a person who falls in love with life. And it shows through my passion for words and my variety of books.

**What do you "discover" when you write?**

Llia: I discover more about myself when I write. I was almost sure I have an ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)



because I can't sit still. I can't even sit comfortably at a cinema because I just need to move from one thing to another, mentally and physically. So, when I write, I need to stay with myself for a little longer, it needs a bit of forcing my body to sit down and type the words coming out of my heart and mind. And when you're able to be at peace, your mind clears, and things come to you like a light bulb. You suddenly get it.

Whether about the content that you're trying to write and the correlation with your reality, to the way you handle yourself to be able to finish the book. People you need to meet will also appear to show you what you missed. Writing invite you to a new piece of land you never knew existed inside you.

How is your stoicism reflected in your writing or in the way you approach writing and publishing?

LLIA: Nothing is bad news for a stoic. When my manuscript got rejected by a publisher, I turn it into a print-on-demand business NulisBuku.com that later grows into a new company Storial.co, a social storytelling platform. You just kind of take whatever life has thrown at you and

hills and the pool.


Then I open my wooden door, feel the fresh air in my face, then take a deep breath. I started to meditate for 20 minutes to expand my heart and reach out for my journal to write and be grateful for my day the day before.

I walked to my writer's room just beside my pool and open my laptop. Took 15 minutes to read books on the

*I need more drama in my life, otherwise I would never be able to write a novel no more!*

turn it into profit (laugh).

As for my writing, I guess I'm very practical in my view about life because of stoicism, my writing is simple and to the point. I kind of joke to my friend Henry Manampiring, the author of Filosofi Teras, that I need more drama in my life, otherwise I would never be able to write a novel no more!

 **How would your perfect day as a writer look like?**

Llia: My perfect day started as I wake up in my little villa overlooking the

table and start to continue writing while sometimes rest and see the forest view on my window. I will write for 2 hours then take a break to walk in the forest around my house for an hour. I start writing again after having a light lunch until around 2 pm.

I'll sunbath by the pool for an hour then take a 2-hour nap. I woke up to get ready to go to the beach and watch the sunset. Then taking notes for any inspired words coming out of my brain.

I'll have dinner with friends until around 9 pm then heads home. I can



watch movies or read books related to my writing until around 10 pm.

Then I'll meditate for 20 minutes before I sleep.

*Llia (Aulia) Halimatussadiah is a writer of 30 books, from novels to how-to books. She is also the co-founder of NulisBuku.com, an online self-publishing platform, and Storial.co, a social storytelling platform that allows writers to do direct publishing digitally. In the past 3 years, she's been writing biographies of successful Indonesian Entrepreneurs. Her latest book 'Done is Better Than Perfect', is a biography of Indonesian Digital Marketer and Serial Entrepreneur, Denny Santoso.*



## BONUS: HANNY KUSUMAWATI

*on interviewing Indonesian writers*

**How did you choose the writers to be interviewed for Behind the Pages?**

Hanny: Mostly, I am being practical by approaching writers I've personally known. It's funny that though I meet some of the writers featured here regularly, we rarely have any intimate conversations about writing or writing process. Yes, we talk about the book

we're currently reading, some new (or old) writers we have just stumbled upon, the going-on in the publishing industry, the projects we're working on, but we didn't go in-depth about a lot of things related to the act of writing itself: the drive, the motivation, the fear (of failure), the moment of 'flow', the struggle, the devotion, the madness surrounding

the whole process of creation.

So, I decided to stir up this kind of conversation via email; containing some of my most honest and genuine questions about a particular writer and his/her writing process. These are all the things I'd like to ask them in person if I were not shy. Most of the time, I am shy.

**Why did you start this project of interviewing Indonesian writers?**

Hanny: I have always loved reading interviews with writers, learning about how each one has different motivations, approaches, and rituals when it comes to writing. Reading writer's interviews is like reading a condensed biography. It gives me an up-close and personal look into the lives and minds of some of my favorite writers. It's intriguing. It's like spying into someone else's creative process and someone else's lives (that fuel their creativity and expression). I want to read writers' interviews whenever I feel like, so I decided to be the interviewer instead. Whenever

I feel like I need a dose of inspiration, I reach out to a writer I know and ask them questions. It helps me to get motivated and get back to work (read: write). I started Behind the Pages back in 2014, and I publish these interviews in English simply to make it more widely accessible.

**How did you come up with the questions? You're not asking the same questions to each writer.**

Hanny: I let my curiosity take over. I am curious about a certain aspect of a certain writer's creative lives, so I ask certain questions to a certain writer about a certain part of their creation/writing process.

To some, I ask about how they can be so disciplined and structured in approaching their work. To some, about how they come up with some particular themes or characters. To some, about their childhood and upbringing. In general, I look at a writer and his/her work, and questions start popping up in my mind. I ask away.

*"Whenever I feel like I need a dose of inspiration, I reach out to a writer I know and ask them questions."*

## What did you learn from this project?

Hanny: That each one of us, writers, simply feel the need to write. I think even if these writers have never gotten their work published, they will still feel the urge to write something, anything. There's a need to write; a need that comes from the need to express oneself. Writing is simply these writers' chosen medium of expression. I also learn that your life, your beliefs, your surroundings, your upbringing, your deepest secrets, fuel your writing. These are what give each writing a different signature, a different flavour, a different voice. A writer needs to learn to embrace life and fall in love with its ups and downs, to fuel his/her works and give meanings to them.

## Do you have some ideas of other Indonesian writers to be interviewed next?

Hanny: Yes, I have some in mind. Rain Chudori, for instance. I am curious about her because she is the kind of girl I'd aspire to be in my teens and early 20s—so free and expressive, a bit rebellious with a certain level of confidence and a kind of I-don't-care attitude; but she



produces something meaningful. She proves herself. I'd like to know how it feels to be her, to occupy her body and her mind, I'd like to know what she cares about. My 17-year-old self would love to ask questions to Rain about all these things.

## Who is your favorite Indonesian writer?

Hanny: Pak Budi Darma! From his stories, I learned about unusual, quirky, imperfect characters and plots. Some of his characters are despicable, but I get to understand them and why they're doing what they're doing. At times, I agree with them, cry for them, and cheer with them--in a way that doesn't make me feel like a bad person. From him, I learned about multifaceted and

multilayered characters. I learned about life, about seeing people as both an antagonist and a protagonist.

## How do these interviews help you when you're writing?

Hanny: They don't. Actually, they help me when I don't feel like writing. I like to read (and do) these interviews when I am too lazy to write or when I am procrastinating about my writing project. Interviewing writers is my way of distracting myself from having to deal with my writing project. It's like enjoying some comfort food during my roughest days. Sometimes, while typing the answers to these interviews, I get an inspiration to write something... or a kick-in-the-butt message to just sit and write. Sometimes, it's my permission slip to be lazy and enjoy the moment of not writing. These interviews are like my travel destination. When I am taking a vacation from writing, I travel to see other writers' minds at work.

*Hanny Kusumawati writes short stories, travel narratives, self-help book, as well as children's book. Her works had been published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Gagas Media, and Bhuana Ilmu Populer. Today, she conducts both online and offline writing workshops (group and private), mainly to help aspiring writers connect with their life story, voice, and confidence. She writes about her writing life (and other things) in her blog, [www.beradadisini.com](http://www.beradadisini.com). Some of her posts have been featured by Wordpress Discover; a showcase of the best WordPress content from around the world, hand picked by a small team of editors.*





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