

Polen LY

The Innocent Orange Blossom

I'll never forget that night in 2012 in Saigon, when my second short film won a prize of "Best Screenplay," and I had no idea of what on Earth *screenplay* was. I had never come across such a word before. While receiving the prize, I heard my soul keep asking me, "What is this award for?" I have to admit that I felt proud, but also ashamed towards myself, towards the cheering crowd who clapped for my achievement when I myself didn't even know what it was. Coming back to my room, the first thing I did was to type into the Google search box: *What does it mean if a film won Best Screenplay?* And that was how I was awakened to the definition of a screenplay.

I told this story to a film director, and he asked me how I made the film. I told him that after completing the story, I listed down the scenes that I want to shoot. I explained scene by scene to the actors, and then they played according to what I told them. The film director went on asking me, was it difficult, then, for me during the shooting? "I don't know, but I was happy then," I innocently replied.

I've loved writing since I was eleven or twelve years old. Being born and raised as an only child in my family did give me enough quiet space to be on my own. I spent most of my free time writing on my mother's Russian-made sewing machine by the window of my bedroom. It had an extended board that gave a perfect balance. All those hours of weeks, of months, of years, of my teenage experience, *writing* was the only way of telling the stories, of painting the places, of expressing the moods that I witnessed from my boundless imagining world. And *music* was a great companion that taught me to have more empathy towards my stories, my characters. When I listened to music, I saw images in my head along with its rhythm, I felt its feeling, its emotion, its story, its life. That's what I have learned: if you seek to understand the feelings of music, you'll never find them. You just listen to it and let it touch you, let it tell you its stories, let it express its feeling to you.

When I turned twenty-three, three years after coming to the city for my medical study, three years of no writing at all, I discovered that there was another way to describe my imagination than by written words: it is moving images. I started making a few short films based on the stories I wrote, passionately, but innocently. Never having been to film school, I never realized that there was a different form of writing used to make a film, which was called *screenplay* or *script*. I made films only based on what I self-taught from watching films and making films.

Soon, I knew how to write a screenplay, and I soon started to find it challenging for me to separate my way of writing fiction from film writing. At first, I felt that in fiction I was freer to tell a story by describing the beauty of words in a poetic or metaphoric form. I loved using a kind of description that was called in Khmer *lively words*: words that the author uses to makes objects feel or do things like humans or animals do. For example, in screenplay I describe: *The sky becomes grey. The leaves are shaken by the wind. It starts to rain.* In fiction I could describe: *The sky got gloomy; its sigh fell and awoke those leaves to dance as if they yearned expectantly for tears from the sky, who began to sob as hard as a baby.* Here, based on writing and reading, I realized how powerful written words could be to direct readers' minds to flow like a river, slowly, serenely, along the course of the author's description and then fall and crash like a waterfall.

This exact realization later did help me to realize further that, actually, word and image have one thing in common: they both *tell* story. Word contains images, image contains words; they both have emotions,

feelings, thoughts that we can experience through their illustration. This helped me to discover that my taste of filmmaking is to tell a story more through visual style than words. I want the story to be potentially seen and understood by a global audience—illiterate or literate, speakers or non-speakers of a particular language.

Within these three years of journey in filmmaking, even though I can't write my scripts like in fiction writing, I don't feel melancholic or nostalgic towards this change at all because the taste of storytelling still remains; I still can include metaphors and poetry in the story, I can even use the sensitivity of music to engage the audience with the stories. It is just a choice between word and image: I choose to empower images to tell the story to audiences the same as a writer who chooses to empower his/her words to attract readers.

*The orange blossom has bloomed,
Shining will be the summer sun,
Will it grow to a tasty fruit
Before the end of autumn?
Only the roots of its tree can tell.*