

## BlazeVOX Interview with Eileen Tabios

### Tell me about your book.

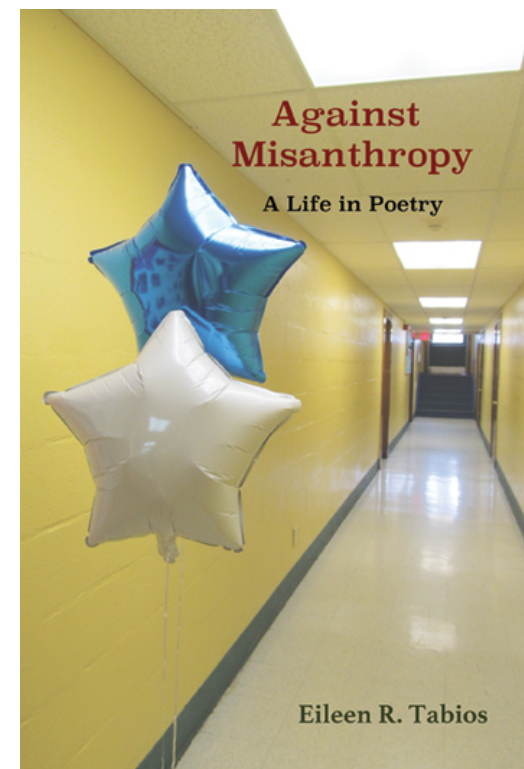
*ABANDONING MISANTHROPY* is many things, including my latest attempt to subvert the genre of autobiography/biography. The book does so through poetry, essays, a collection of blurbs I've written for others, interviews and even an essay by my mother. Disrupting the (traditional) form and genre of autobiography and biography is one of my interests, primarily because it amuses me. But there's certainly many reasons why one (or I) desires to disrupt auto/biography—from the general factors of how one may or may not ever know the true story, how one elides the true story, and how I believe identity is both constrained by inherited circumstances as well as fluctuates such that any life story narrative is at best a snapshot narrative rather than something that can hold true over time. I call these “general” factors because they can apply to everybody, thus how \*knowing one's self\* is one of the most difficult goals to achieve.

But then when, in my case, one is forced to grapple with immigration, diaspora, minority/POC positionings in the land where the migratory transplant ends, then the memoir, by being a genre that posits it can present an accurate life story, becomes a landscape fertile for disruption.

### What influenced this book?

My attempts for “Poetry as a way of life.” A book can be many things, including a concept. This book was written in a day based on a concept I thought of in the morning. The individual pieces that make it up weren't created in a day and, in some cases, required years. But the organization of those individual elements into a book was conceived and manifested in a day.

I began 2015 with five manuscripts and the two that have been released so far both were conceived and manifested in one day. These periods, which require a temporary environment of magnified resonance, are gifts—and I believe are possible because I've tried to structure my life to be open to such moments.



Awareness. Education. Mindfulness. So when an idea flits by, I am able to discern it and (if I like the idea) then manifest it.

**Where does this book fit into your career as a writer?**

Nowhere. I have a life—not career—as a writer.

(A life approximated by <http://eileenrtabios.com> )

**If you had to convince a friend or colleague to read this book, what might you tell them?**

I might say, “If you read my book, you will discover something about yourself.”

That’s a statement, of course, that can be applied to any book. But since, as the author, I choose to answer your question in this way, there’s an added significance that might intrigue a potential reader.

**Tell me about the last literary reading you attended.**

It was a reading/panel featuring various Filipina writers. Each writer discussed or presented their works. It’s always satisfying to connect with other Filipina writers; many are writing wonderful works. But my favorite reaction was from an audience member who expressed gratitude that I expanded the notion of “Filipina writer.” She apparently had felt disconnected to the Filipina community as she herself was writing works that didn’t “fit” in with what many publicly-lauded writers were doing. So she appreciated my contribution for encouraging her to continue her creative attempts her own way, with her own voice.

While I appreciate her response, her response in fact shows that what I’m doing also doesn’t “fit” with what many would consider to be Filipino literature. I’m used to that, though; a Filipino reader once said I or my works were not authentically Filipino. But the more important point may be that what I am doing generally isn’t a replication of what’s out there. And for a poet (or any artist) isn’t that a good thing?

**When did you realize you we're a writer?**

I’ve long loved words. In the beginning, though, I thought I was a writer as a journalist and journalism indeed was my first profession. I didn’t begin poetry until my mid-thirties. My mother, though, apparently knew otherwise. She wrote an essay about me—the last prose piece in *AGAINST MISANTHROPY*—that said I, as a young child, was already interested in creating books. She said I made my first book at age five—a visual narrative with the help of Crayola and generous use of stick figures. I discovered this essay among her papers two years after her death. You can imagine my astonishment...

**Tell us about your process: Pen and Paper, computer, notebooks ... how do you write?**

A few years ago, I began trying to do drafts of poems only in my mind. The risk, of course, is that I might forget something when I finally write it down (whether by computer or paper is not significant to my process). But I've long thought that if the thought isn't compelling enough to survive the road from my mental conceptualization to the actual writing, then it's not compelling enough for me to chase the thought.

More recently, I created a poetry generator (part of my "Murder, Death and Resurrection" project). This MDR Poetry Generator has a database of 1,146 lines. Its conceit is that one can randomly combine any of the lines in any length between couplets to a long poem of 1,146 lines, and the result would be an effective poem. Since I created this generator, I've only written one new poem that's not crafted from its lines. So, to answer your question, my current process of writing a poem may be one of pointing at various lines at random from a print-out of the generator's database. It seems to be working as it's generated acceptances from various journals, two published poetry collections and three other poetry manuscripts. At some point, of course—and I may already be there—I'll stop relying on the generator for making new poems.

**How do you handle a bad review of your work?**

I initially thought to say, "I try to learn from it." But, to be more truthful, I handle a bad review with sadness.

By the way, I haven't received bad written reviews (most written reviews have been positive). It's just that some of my books have received indifference—that, of course, is the most negative review of all.

Still, any sad reaction goes away swiftly because I'm usually well on to the next projects. An effect of being so prolific is not over-dwelling on reactions (positive or negative) to prior books.

**Which writer would you most like to have a drink with, and why?**

Because I haven't seen him in over a decade, the poet Eric Gamalinda who just came out with a luminous novel, *THE DESCARTES HIGHLAND*. Also, he's Pinoy which means our drinks may just be accompanied with "pulutan" (various Filipino small dishes).

**What's the biggest mistake you've made as a writer?**

According to me, none; all steps and missteps have been useful.

According to others, I have made mistakes. One is releasing more than one book each five years as that supposedly limits a poet's career. Another is when I transitioned from conventional to more experimentally-focused writing—this is according to a poet-editor who stopped publishing my works when I ceased linear narrative (about 15 years after this incident, I'm looking at linear narrative today with different eyes).

**What's the worst advice you hear authors give writers?**

Don't publish more than one book every five years. Stick with accessible writing.

Just kidding. I'd say the worst advice I've heard are those that emanate from the advisor's thought that his experience and/or opinion is the general determinant for how things should unfold for other writers.

**What scares you the most?**

Exposure to others' lack of compassion.

**Where do you buy your books?**

Direct from authors and publishers. Bookstores, especially used bookstores. Amazon—yes, I sometimes rely on them because I live in an area where there aren't many booksellers.

**Who are you reading now?**

Tons of poetry review copies. I don't assign myself poetry books to review; I just try to read as widely as I can and then review those that compel my reviewing attention (a list of such books is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com/with-the-community/selected-reviews-and-engagements/>). As well, I'm currently reading *TOMORROW'S MEMORIES: A DIARY 1924-1928* by Angeles Monrayo and *GIRL DRIVE: CRISS-CROSSING AMERICA, REDEFINING FEMINISM* by Nona Willis Aronowitz & Emma Bee Bernstein.

**What is your favorite TV show at the moment?**

I don't watch TV. But I Netflix- and Youtube-binge. Among TV shows, I've binged on THE WEST WING, HOUSE OF CARDS, SCANDAL, LIE TO ME, LEVERAGE, the cooking show CHOPPED (though I don't cook), NUMB3RS, HAWAII 5-0, HOARDERS, DANCE MOMS, the real estate reality shows THE PROPERTY BROTHERS, HOUSE HUNTERS (& INTERNATIONAL) COLLECTION, SELLING NEW YORK – among others. I'm currently binge-ing on Alaska: love YUKON MEN and now am on ALASKA: THE LAST FRONTIER.

**Bonus Round:**

**What do you want the world to know about you? Make it juicy ....**

My poems can make you wet: salivate, sweat, cry and ...

Having said that, I don't want the world to know anything about me except what they imagine/extrapolate (correct or not) from my words. *AGAINST MISANTHROPY* is a perfect exercise for this because I believe if you read it beginning-to-end, a profile surfaces that could define "Eileen R. Tabios"—yet it'd be a profile where the reader is as much the author as the one attached to the book's bylin