

**Publication: Manila Bulletin**  
**Date: 9 November 2014**  
**Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding**

## **A few words to our poets in hiding**

PUBLISHED ON NOVEMBER 9, 2014  
BY AA PATAWARAN

What's keeping you in the dark, hiding your words in your investment

banker's briefcase?

Under your doctor's cloak or your nurse's uniform?

Beneath the piles of trade reports or the finance documents on your desk?

Between the sheets of the science books at your dorm?

Tucked behind the grocery lists on your fridge?

Won't your words take you some place?

Bring some food to the table? Raise a family? Pay the bills?

Make you happy? Keep you satisfied?

Won't your words meet your needs?

Help you get up in the morning?

I think Irish poet Paul Muldoon is happy.

Happy and very Irish indeed, always writing with a wink

Or at least he seems not only in the right place

But singing, even dancing, right where he is

Right in the center of it

I met him last weekend at the Singapore Writers Festival.

**Publication: Manila Bulletin**

**Date: 9 November 2014**

**Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding**

On stage he was a rock star, while he read his stuff

Was it poetry? Was it prose? Was it music? Was it spoken word?

When your sentences sing, said Paul, consider yourself a poet

That must be how he won the Pulitzer for Poetry

“Where did you learn to kiss like that?”

He read a piece he wrote for the festival

“Was it in the Ritz

You first locked lips

With Ernest Hemingway...”

And then there was former US Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky

Should I say he is happy, too?

He breaks into songs every time he talks about writing

He breaks into verses every time he answers a question

He breaks into the rhythm words make as they collide to make a point.

I met Pinsky at the festival last weekend, just like Muldoon

On the opening stage, he read a poem in the company of a saxophonist

He might as well have been David Bowie

Or Mick Jagger or, well, Daft Punk without the robot face

He wore his soul on his sleeve

**Publication: Manila Bulletin**

**Date: 9 November 2014**

**Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding**

Paul Tan is the festival director

Has been for four years and seen the festival grow every year

From seed planted in 1986 now it's a forest

Nurtured and let free to grow by leaps and bounds by the National Arts Council

A forest that houses every aching or joyful Singaporean soul

From such a forest the branches have reached out to the world

Taking and giving, throwing ideas and techniques around in the mix

All drinking from the pool of infinite inspiration

With poets Paul and Robert and writers, thinkers, scholars from around the globe

Screaming, mumbling, whispering, singing in English, Chinese, Malay, Tamil...

In this 10-day festival, an annual event, the writing mind is ever in spring

Sharing inspirations with US feminist and political activist Naomi Wolf

Or North Korean memoirist Andrew Lam

Or Filipino comic book creator Paolo Fabregas

Or this year's headliner, travel writer and novelist Paul Theroux

I was most curious about the young Singaporean Justin Ker

Neurosurgeon by day, flash fictionist by night

I bought his book *The Space Between the Raindrops*

A short trip through a portal to the soul

"Flash fiction at its best," said USA Today

**Publication: Manila Bulletin**  
**Date: 9 November 2014**  
**Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding**

And there was the Proletariat Poetry Factory  
What thrills a single word could bring  
Give them a word and they turn it into a poem  
And you pay them as much or as little as you want  
And give them only a few minutes to make the deadline

I gave them the word Manila  
And Proletariat Poetry Factory went abuzz  
“Bustling city, to many this is home”  
“Too many motorcycles to count”  
In the end they wrote a poem about a city you loved and hated at once

And so from Singapore I came home straining to hear the words in the roar  
of our motorcycles  
I put my ear on the ground listening to the rhythm of our footsteps  
Where are we going, where have we been, are walking or running or standing still?  
Are the answers in the noise of the world marching in—Paris, London, Sydney, Tokyo?  
Or do we need to give voice to our culture and articulate our feelings?

What we need is what Paul Tan calls a “festival of ideas,”  
like the Singapore Writers Festival  
A local literary eco-system supported by the government as well as the community

**Publication: Manila Bulletin**  
**Date: 9 November 2014**  
**Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding**

What we need is a word of inspiration, reflection, empowerment

What we need is the story of our collective lives well told in fact or fiction

What we need is an inspired and empowered nation



Graffiti at the Singapore Management University (left), a session at the Festival Pavilion with Singapore authors Cyril Wong and Justin...



Paul

poet



Cyril Wong, author of Ten Things My Father Never Taught Me

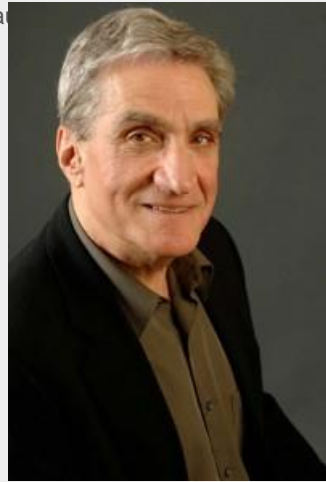
Publication: Manila Bulletin

Date: 9 November 2014

Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding



Justin Ker, author of *The Raindrops*



Robert Pinsky,



Pai Pai Cho Performance by Wu Jia Ban Youth & Children Performing Group



**Publication: Manila Bulletin**

**Date: 9 November 2014**

**Headline: A few words to our poets in hiding**



The Proletariat Poetry Factory in action.

The Singapore Writers Festival is one of Asia's premier literary events. What started in 1986 as a biennial festival is now held yearly, a much anticipated event on the cultural calendar as it presents the world's major literary talents to Singaporeans while shining a spotlight on homegrown creative talents. This year's festival ran under the theme "The Prospect of Beauty" from Oct. 31 to Nov. 9 on the Singapore Management University's Campus Green and in the surrounding venues, including The Arts House, the National Museum of Singapore, the Singapore Art Museum, and the National Library.