

YOU TAUGHT US HOW TO FIGHT WITH WORDS

To root ourselves in previously untold stories
of country and people
You laid bare for the first time
for all times

To capture the sheen of a luminous future
from the darkened mirror of a usable past
Almost overshadowing the turbulent present

You taught us to fight with words
To be bold and daring
To engage in verbal combat
even with the high and mighty
Defying the censors of the conquerors
Enduring a long and costly witch-hunt
Being called un-Filipino
when just being true Filipinos
Decolonized ones, exposing recolonization

You taught us to fight with words
To draw strength from affection
coming from all quarters
From a few loyal friends, as you described them,
And most importantly,
From a wife who learned to fight with you
,With words of her own
She whom you called “the lighthouse of
my intellectual peregrinations”

She who likened herself to a carpenter
Patiently putting together
The scaffolding, the building blocks,
and the finishing touches to your work
as masterful architect

She who finally earned the title “co-author”
Co-creator of lives entwined, lives well-lived
Bringing forth children, grandchildren,
and great grandchildren by blood --
or by choice --
Who defend and continue to walk on
the road you took, the one less traveled ,
And learned to cherish the inner softness
beneath the outer toughness
of a battle-scarred warrior

You taught us how to fight with words
To be “moved by great feelings of love”
As revolutionaries had been
Before and after Che Guevara’s life - and death -
Proved that what he said was true
We hang by his words,
And yours, who showed us
That transformative power
can come not from the barrel of a gun
But from a skillfully wielded pen

You taught us how to fight with words
we keep in our armory
Now that we are In an age
when a new world Is struggling to be born
from the belly of the beast
And the monsters have come out --
invading and marauding --
With no need for masks
to hide their brutality and greed

You taught us how to fight with words
to strengthen our resolve
As we continue to wage
what are no longer lonely battles
Fought not with arms
But with words like yours
Imprinted in the hearts of warriors --
The red-blooded young who are marching,
And the old like us, wrinkled and wizened,
Who will never surrender our pens.

April 18, 2026

Rosalina Ofreneo