A COLLECTION OF NOTES ON WRITING

Provided to the Cambria Rough Writers
By Paula Cizmar

Collected by Robbin Miller

We appreciate Paula's years as our mentor and her legacy of constructive engagement.

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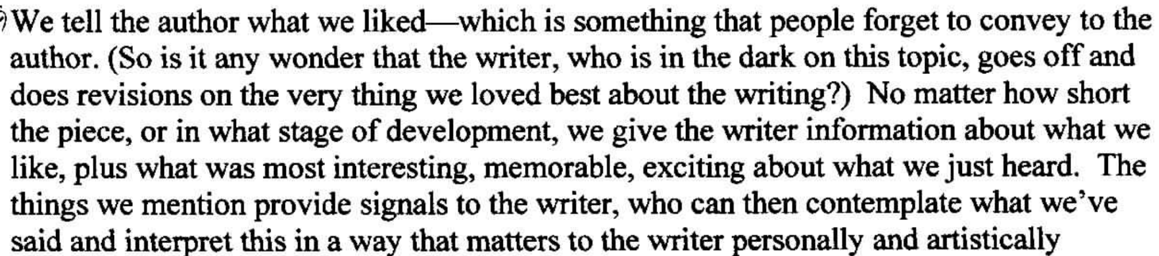
Notes on Constructive Feedback/p. cizmar

The constructive feedback system we use in Rough Writers is based on a critical response technique developed by Liz Lerman, a MacArthur "Genius" Grant-winning choreographer. Her goal was to find a way to provide useful information for artists in various phases of the creative process, that is, information focusing on the value of the piece, the in-progress nature of the work, and the intentions of the author, rather than the desires of the person to whom the work is being presented. That's the important underlying principle: How can we help the author create the best work that he/she intends? Thus we banish words like "should," as in "You should do x," and we banish the well-meaning but hackneyed rules offered by some writing schools/coaches/ bloggers/etc. And, of course, personal attack is never allowed. We want to help open our fellow writers' imaginations, rather than shut them down. Lerman uses four steps, more complicated than ours—but that process takes much longer. In RWs, we distill the process to three steps.

RW Three-Step Feedback Process

1. Statements of Affirmation


We tell the author what we liked—which is something that people forget to convey to the author. (So is it any wonder that the writer, who is in the dark on this topic, goes off and does revisions on the very thing we loved best about the writing?) No matter how short the piece, or in what stage of development, we give the writer information about what we like, plus what was most interesting, memorable, exciting about what we just heard. The things we mention provide signals to the writer, who can then contemplate what we've said and interpret this in a way that matters to the writer personally and artistically

2. Neutral Questions from Responders

watch how u phrase quest.

At this point, the idea is to simply ask for points of clarification and to pose neutral questions (e.g., What was the mood you were going for in this scene?). Often the question, though we attempt to phrase it in a neutral manner, becomes a way of stating an opinion about what might not be working. The point in this segment, though, is to merely pose questions that may provide the author with a new way of thinking about the writing, or to alert the author to anything that is confusing. The questions are intended to recognize that the work has value and allow the writer to hear feedback in a way that is not an attack and that is not prescriptive. Ultimately, it's up to writers to consider what kind of work they want to create—and how they want to fix it. Our questions can help steer the writer's thoughts. Example of opinionated question: Why is that color so dark? Example of neutral question: What type of tone were you going for?

3. Permissioned Opinions/Ideas for Revision

avoid shoulds strict rules

In this section, we offer ideas for revision, stating opinions about what we feel needs improvement. But we are NOT to be prescriptive, issue demands, or say, You SHOULD. These are ideas for the writer, not requirements. The author has an intended outcome. The author knows what it is. It is the author's work. Not ours. At any point, the writer is allowed to say, "Thanks, I've heard enough. I'm on overload. We can stop talking," etc.

Now, of course, we stray outside these boundaries—partly because the discussion becomes a fluid conversation, partly because we have known each other a while. And when a project is in rewrites, the game changes a bit, because the writer is looking for some specific editorial assistance. Nevertheless, the above are the components of a healthy discussion for work that is in a stage of evolving, developing, becoming.

Other methods of critique:

Dramaturge's Roundtable Process (with thanks to Henry Murray)
This type of critique is very valuable, but again, this one takes a great deal of time; it is best to be used in a group of three or four, and only after a first draft has been created. Thus, this is a rewrite tool. Note that though it is different from the Lerman or RW process, it also is focused on the author's *intent*.

Using this method, the entire group reads the complete draft on their own, before the feedback session. Then, at the session, a group leader poses this question to the author: What is the STORY you are telling?
The author then relates the story as he/she sees it. Note: This is story, not character, not situation.
After this, the group leader asks each member of the group: Is this the story you heard? And if not, how does the story you perceived differ from the author's?
Next, the group leader poses this question to the author:
What is the MEANING/THEME of the piece?
The author then relates the theme or message of the piece as he/she sees it. Note: This is theme/meaning/message—not story!
After this, the group leader asks each member of the group: Is this the meaning/theme you got from the piece? If not, what meaning did you gather from it?

Approximately one hour is allotted to each author in this method.

Guided Questions
This type of critique is also a rewrite technique—though it could be adapted for feedback on brand new pages. In this critique, the author prepares three or four specific questions about the work he/she is presenting. Immediately after the work is presented, the author then asks the questions. The discussion is supposed to stick to the questions posed by the author, rather than stray off to topics about what the reader/audience wants to see.

The author may pose questions about character, story, language, etc. This type of critique session works best for authors who are in the latter stages of revisions and have concerns about some specific areas of the manuscript. It also serves to keep responders on track and not pursuing their own agendas. Some disadvantages of this methods are: The author may not really have a good notion of what questions to pose; the author may be avoiding asking questions about a troublesome area of the writing—and thus avoid having to rewrite; the responders may have information that is helpful, but the questions have restricted them from providing it.

NO MATTER WHAT THE CRITIQUE METHOD:
Focus on the author's intent. What is the author trying to do here? What is the author's intended tone? intended story? intended outcome? How can we help the author achieve what he/she intended to write? You don't have to like the genre, or like the characters, or like the style. Just consider: Is this what the author INTENDED?

Excerpts from: *This Language Thing* by Paula Cizmar. (*Parabasis*, Spring 2003

> If you think of a scene or chapter as a piece of music—one that is crucial in the creation of a larger piece of music—you'll realize that elements of music can be utilized by writers to create vivid work. The sounds of words evoke responses, plus there's an internal rhythm and pace of scenes; and then, of course, there's the art of combining scenes of varying paces to make the larger work more dynamic. Tools such as word choice, imagery, punctuation (in the larger sense), and when to reveal (and when not to reveal) vital information all work together as you build an expressive story.
>
> Words contain surface meaning and embedded meaning; the connotations of a particular word may conjure up political or social or emotional messages which its synonym might not. Look at a few examples: Who sounds breezier, more arrogant—a "flyboy" or a "pilot"? What does "stupor" call to mind that its synonyms, "muddle" or "trance," do not? (And, by the same token, what do they connote?)
>
> Not only do words have their own rhythm and pace, when used in combination they can create a completely different rhythm and pace. Carefully, thoughtfully chosen words yield writing that is vibrant, alive, and seamless. Words that are used without much attention paid to the emotional punch they pack may yield work that is general or soft or listless. In work with generic word usage, the presence of Life seems to be absent. The words accomplish the bare minimum: They get us from A to Z. Our object, however, is to get from A to Z and make it a hell of a ride.

THIS LANGUAGE THING - Part 1

There was a time when the paintings of Edward Hopper didn't do much for me. I had never seen them live, in the flesh—only reproductions in art books or magazines—so I dismissed them as mere sentimental realism. Corny. Old-fashioned. A step up from advertising art. But when I was living in New York, a dear friend and director I was working with, Stuart White, insisted that as a writer it was absolutely imperative that I go see the Hopper retrospective at the Whitney. Stuart was brilliant, intuitive, charismatic; like many people I would have walked over hot coals for him—but then he would have first walked over them himself. So I forced myself up to the Whitney. The fact that Hopper's stuff was hanging just a floor down from James Turrell's light and space installations was another inducement. After a glance at the Hopper twaddle, I figured, I could go and bask in the avant-garde. Well, Stuart--inspiring, instinctive, magical artist that he was--of course was right about the work of Edward Hopper.

The paintings that my friend insisted that everyone share were brilliant, heartbreaking, soul-aching reflections of the curse and joy of being human; the way Hopper used paint, the way he captured light, the isolation of his human subjects--all showed an artist whose depth of expression was enough to create goosebumps. There it was, on canvas: Loneliness. Poverty. Dignity. A search for some kind of touch, some kind of hookup, some kind of contact with another. The paintings weren't just photo-realism: They went so far beyond that. They provoked an immediate visceral reaction: I could feel in them the streets of places like my hometown, Youngstown, Ohio. A dying rust-colored mill town. I could see the misery and confusion of the old souls that wandered through the towns and rooms of this painter's art.

Hopper's work was so vital that I tacked a quotation of his on the wall above my desk: "I find the great painters...have attempted to force this unwilling medium of paint and canvas into a record of their emotions. I find any digression from this large aim leads me to boredom." For Hopper,

"emotions" didn't just mean, Gee, I feel unhappy today. "Emotions" meant a person's vast and varied inner life that resulted in a personalized view of the world. For Hopper, that inner life was shaped by The Depression and World War II. The people in his paintings—well, not just people, but even the objects—reflect poverty, turmoil, fear.

After I saw the paintings—after I saw Hopper's emotional interpretation of the world—I took on his goal as one of my own. To take the unwilling medium of words and paper and use them to attempt to record a gut-level expression of human life.

Language as a medium for expressionism is a huge pain in the butt. Oh, yeah, language is great for basic communication: I'm going to the store. You're giving me a headache. Go two more blocks and turn left on Pico. I feel pretty, oh so pretty. But who wants to sit for two hours and listen to characters on screen announce their emotions and announce their actions. Audiences don't want to be told it, they want to see it. Feel it.

Music has a leg up in the feeling department—something about sound and rhythm goes straight to the gut. And visual art can pluck the heartstrings, too—color and texture have energy and provoke some kind of nameless feeling, and it's that nameless quality that is truly exciting. But the problem is, words aren't paint. Words are an integral part of everyday life. They have so many mundane purposes. Words can be flat out banal. The trick becomes taking something so ordinary and using it in such an extraordinary way that it packs an unmistakable electrical charge. Evoking something nameless. Something out of this world.

THIS LANGUAGE THING – PART 2

LANGUAGE—CODE CRACKERS

As writers we have to be connected into the conscious, the unconscious, and the non-conscious, the real, the non-real, the hyper-real. Then we get to go to work. Fashioning something wonderful with such an ordinary tool as language requires that we crack the code.

Something—power, energy, passion, light—is hidden beneath these mundane little language units, words, and the sooner we shake them up and tap into the power source, the better. As a tool, when you think about it, language is such a huge, monumental entity with such infinite combinations yielding infinite possibilities. It's staggering. It's awesome. It's better *not* to think about it.

I have some code crackers I use to unearth what's primal and hidden within words. I try not to think about these code cracking devices. I try to feel them. But for what it's worth, here they are:

AX THE ADJECTIVES. Consider this: You have a friend you're trying to fix up with a date. What's the worst thing you can say about the person? He's nice. Kiss of death. It just doesn't tell us anything about him—and leads us to believe there isn't anything to tell. Or consider this: What conveys more? A character who says: I'm unhappy. Or having a character walk into a party, see all her friends, and say, There's no one here. We have to work harder as audience members/readers to try and figure out what she means; in the process, we feel an emotional response. Is the character being funny? Ironic? Do we like her because of it? Does the character mean "the love of my life has left me, therefore it is worthless to be in a crowd"? Or, "there's no one politically important here"? Or ??? Whatever the meaning, it is not an obvious one, not sitting on the surface, and audience members/readers are forced to participate in the search for clues. They are drawn in. One step closer to engaging in the characters' emotional life. Adjectives don't engage. They announce. They keep us at arm's length. They're flat. Hollow. (CONTINUED)

Write Good Stuff

"Adjective-speak" is what I call scenes that are written in announcement style; adjective-speak is the most surfacey type of writing. It is merely expositional: You're the best one for the job. Isn't the sunset pretty? I feel sick. This might be the way people speak in day to day life--after all, it's way more convenient--but remember, we're not really transcribing real life when we write a scene. (Hitchcock again: Film/characters/etc. are life with the boring parts left out.) We only have our audience a short amount of time, and in that time, we have to pack an entire lifetime of hopes, dreams, disappointments, personal histories. Because of this, we must load every word with as much meaning as possible and string these words into phrases that pack power--yes, that pack a punch. (Think back to an exercise of John Gardner's: Describe a house in the words of a man who has just lost a loved one. Then describe the same house in the words of someone who is in love.) Adjective-speak merely lists an idea of a possible generic feeling or meaning; it can't take the audience any further. Adjectives don't have skin and bone. Axe em. (Well, OK, not all of em. You can choose a tiny select few.) (Then be brutal.) (Chop.)

RHYTHM. Absolutely critical. This is one element we can steal from music. Great writing has great rhythm--varied, specific, hypnotic. Varied? Sometimes fast, sometimes slow, a regular beat, off the beat, clipped, droning, sustained. Specific? You probably did not consciously select a particular word in a line of dialogue, but conscious or not, you know when the word is dead-on right in its rhythm--and you have a nagging sense of dread when it is not. Hypnotic? Irresistible rhythm is a sneaky but very effective way to draw the audience in. How to create rhythm? Syllables and sounds--use them. Vary them. Or deliberately string the same number of syllables and beats together over and over and over again. Bounce words back and forth off the various characters. Verbal ping pong. Or try a waltz. Let the words just roll along. Try repetition for effect. Whatever makes the language sing. Or punctuate with words. Single syllable words can stop a breathless speech on a dime--and if you want to cut through a forest of obfuscating words, why not do it in a single blow?

PACE. Is the scene moving along? Is the story in general moving along? Are events and ideas unfolding or unraveling in such a way that the audience has to keep on their toes to stay caught up--but not so slowly that they get ahead of you and sit around waiting, and not so fast that they get frustrated or overworked and just give up trying? Remember the principle of varying lengths and tones--another matter of balance. If you get the audience on a roll and hit them with one terse dialogue line after another and you lull them into thinking they're onto you, what do you do next? Throw a wrench into the works, of course. Slow down; take a breather; add a speech that explores character or that languishes in an image. Or build your dialogue lines up to a mini-climax and stop on a dime for a while. Avoid bouncing around from quick exchange to character wallow pointlessly or from fast pace to slow and back again without emotional reason. You are expressing feelings through pace, presenting tension and suspense through pace. It should not be accidental.

Take out names in dialogue

EDGES. Writing has its own geography: sharp peaks, low valleys, and rolling hills that caress and soothe. All these diverse edges are a must in expressing atmosphere, tone, and a character's inner life. Think of how "s" sounds; then contrast it with "b" or "p." Think of words that end in "k"--now contrast them with words that end in "n." Does this matter? Yes, especially in scriptwriting, where the words will actually be spoken. The sounds of words can assault. Or lull. Sharp edges pack a punch. When you're building suspense, or conveying rage, for example, the words need to cut, batter, and slap. Go for the throat. Attack the ears. Short lines, the physical nature of the chosen words, the use of hard consonants like k's, p's, b's, the no-nonsense approach (i.e., no "and's", "well's", "uh's", "you know's") all add up to solid hard edges. Think of a love scene written with such edgy sounds: It's less common, but it might tell us something about the

characters' relationship, or their economic class, or the nightmarish situation they're up against. Then there are times when the words must just flow, they must soothe or seduce, inspire confidence. To soften edges up, let the sounds be more smooth. Reverse the hard-sharp edge process and let the words glide. And mix it up. No one note in music is so awe-inspiring that the audience is content to hear only that one sound. Scene writing shouldn't be one-note either. But a word of warning: Here's where balance comes in, the old not one, not two again--Think about using words for your edges but don't think about it. Let your intuition guide you. Too much overt effort on this point can make your writing self-conscious. And tedious. Always balance. Balance.

PUNCH. The emotional wallop. The power of a true and unique expression of what is going on. Simply, make sure you select words that go for your audience's gut. Forget about aiming at the heart; the writing will just get all squishy. And if you aim for the gut, the brain can't help itself: It will get involved, too. If you aim solely for the intellect, however, the brain won't share. Your audience will nod and say, Oh, interesting, and then go in search of more thrills elsewhere.

POETRY FOR POETRY'S SAKE--NOT. Writers generally have at least some touch of the poet within them. It may vary by degrees, with playwrights and novelists probably having slightly stronger poetic leanings than screenwriters. But let's face it: Writing in any form is not an easy task. Playwrights tell a story using only action, behavior, and dialogue on a set everyone knows isn't real using live actors who are about four feet away from the audience in a little (or large) darkened room with about a third of the inhabitants rattling paper or picking the most dramatically devastating moment to sneeze; if you're writing novels you must write so vividly and specifically that a reader sitting in a hot apartment on the day the leaf-blower guys come can feel the emotional pain and hear the voices of your characters who are traversing a deadly glacier in the Yukon as their lives flash before their eyes--even though the voices are only in the reader's head and no live person speaks them. And if you're a screenwriter you must create an entire world, an entire vision, not only just a picture of what's going on in the foreground but what the camera will catch in the overall milieu while compressing the dialogue to such a point that the audience can pick up the essence of the characters without the story grinding to a halt while they're distracted by that weird crawly mark on the projection screen and the supersized Coca-Cola that spilled three rows away and is rushing toward their shoes.

Each genre has its own limitations: Fiction writers don't have the benefit of sound and pictures; their words are the whole show. Scriptwriters don't have the benefit of interior monologue--they don't get to use narration in the same way. No, scriptwriters have this stage thing or this screen thing, these actor people, and these words. Which have to sound like real speech, except they're not, they're hyper-real, 'cause real speech, when you think about it, would be a REAL bore and a half. No matter the genre, to pull off writing takes something really special.

So tell me a memoir writer or a playwright or a nonfiction writer isn't a poet? I can't hear you. Anyway, the point is: We already use poetry in our work. With any luck, it is skillfully woven into character and story. Axe all the rest, the lines that just sound pretty or artsy or poetic for the sake of it. Axe that--and the poetic is distilled down to its primitive essence. And that's what we want.

And finally: PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION. This is the easy one. Find paintings. Look at them. Approach writing as if it has color, texture, movement. It does.

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NOTES ON STYLE/paula cizmar

What few of you know about me is that, for years, I supported my writing career by working as a freelance copy editor, developmental editor, and (sometimes) ghostwriter for major publishing companies, including Random House, Simon & Schuster, Harcourt, and St. Martin's Press. I've worked on fiction and nonfiction, trade and textbooks. So I speak from firsthand experience when I say that each press has a specific style that is required for all books published by that house. "Style" in this case is the language usage, punctuation, and number system used in publication (rather than "style" in a design or fashion sense). Most houses use a variation on the Chicago Manual of Style, although some use MLA, AP, or APA. If you're writing for hire, use the style manual required by your publisher. If you're writing on spec—which is what most of you are doing, i.e., you're writing something on your own which will then be submitted for publication—pick one style and stick with it. The most important part of proper style can be summed up in two words: BE CONSISTENT. Here are a few basics:

Commas

For lists of items, use the *serial comma* (AKA *series comma*). Example:

"...red, white, and blue." (Rather than "...red, white and blue.")

The serial comma is much more precise, and no one will ever mistake which words are items in a list and which words are part of another phrase. HOWEVER: If you do not wish to use the serial comma, then be consistent. Either *always* use it, or *never* use it. It is not correct to use it sometimes and not other times.

For long complicated lists, use semi-colons. Use commas to separate items within a larger item; use semi-colons to separate the groupings of items. Examples:

> The price of the product differed depending on the specific chemical makeup of the requested material; the amount of tempering and adjustment required in the manufacturing process; and the difficulty in shipping the various sizes to certain transfer facilities.
>
> The discussion would explore texture, finish, and material; specific style or genre; and color, hue, and tint.

Quotation marks with other punctuation

Quotation marks go outside commas and periods. However, quotation marks go inside semi-colons. Examples:

> "This day was too long," she said. "Even thinking about it makes me tired."
>
> Twain's formula was "1 percent inspiration, 99 percent perspiration," and he rarely waivered from this ratio.
>
> For Jen, this was just a matter of "sticks and stones."
>
> At first glance, he saw that many of those chosen were what Ackerman called the "usual suspects"; however, some of the selected ones were brand new.

That/Which
That is restrictive. *Which* is nonrestrictive. *That* immediately follows the word it is referring to and does not take a comma. If a word or phrase separates *that* from the word it refers to, use *which* without a comma. When *which* is used in a nonrestrictive sense, it requires a comma. Examples:

> The country that produces the most goat cheese is France.
> The country in North America which produces the least goat cheese is Canada.
> Countries producing goat cheese, which is quite delicious, often have trade agreements with the United States.

Dialogue
In dialogue, characters may speak using slang, or non-grammatical language, or fragments. Dialogue should mimic everyday speech.

When one character's dialogue continues from one paragraph to the next, do not use an end quotation mark at the end of the first paragraph, but do begin the new paragraph with a quotation mark.

To create dialogue that flows, use *said* or *says* most of the time. These words become invisible, thereby highlighting what the character is saying. Fancy constructions such as "he asserted" or "she interjected" tend to clutter up the dialogue and call more attention to themselves than what the character is saying.

Avoid using commas in place of periods. Examples of properly punctuated dialogue:

> "Stop it," she said. "I'm outta here. I warned you."
> "First you buy some flour," she says. "Then you can start the crust."
> "It's not likely," he said, "but it certainly is possible."

Numbers
There are a variety of rules, depending on the style manual used or the specific publisher. Some say spell out numbers one to ten and then use numerals after that. Some say spell out numbers after 100, except for units of measure. PICK ONE and be consistent.

My preferred number system is:
Spell out numbers up to 100. So it would be "ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall" or "there were six cows in the pasture."
Use numerals for units of measure. E.g., "the fence was 8 feet tall" or "she answered correctly 78 percent of the time" or "the canal was 18 miles away."
Spell out round numbers. E.g., a million, one thousand, ten thousand, two hundred.
IF a numeral is used in a paragraph (for example, "342 hats"), then use numerals for all the numbers in that paragraph, even if the numbers are below 100. (For example: "First Josh planned on making a minimum of 342 hats. This seemed like a good number until he saw that only 21 people would be attending. That meant he would have to convince each of them to wear more than 3 hats apiece.")

Some editorial style guidelines for writers... P. Cizmar

Punctuation that Involves Quotation Marks
Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. Examples:

> "I wish it would rain," she said. "The garden really needs it."
>
> The police department's press officer clarified that Gardner was a "person of interest," not a suspect.

Punctuating Lists
Lists may be punctuated in either of the following ways:
red, white and blue OR red, white, and blue

The second example, which has a comma before the word "and," uses the serial comma.

For lists, the use of the serial comma is optional, however it is important to point out that the serial comma enhances the reader's ability to comprehend what you are saying.

NOTE: Whatever way you choose to punctuate lists, be sure to use the same type of punctuation through the ENTIRE manuscript, i.e., don't use the serial comma sometimes and no comma before the "and" at other times.

Complex Lists
Sometimes lists are composed of complicated items, such as items that themselves are a list. In this case, use semi-colons to separate each complete item (and use commas within each list item). Example:

> The board had to deal with several long-term issues including strategies for growth; press, promotion, and marketing; restructuring policy-change protocols; revenue, trades, and expenditures; brand identity fluctuations; and developments in recent research.

Apostrophes
To show possessive, use an apostrophe followed by an "s." When showing possessive for a group or plural noun, put the apostrophe after the "s" or word ending. Examples:

The boy's coat was torn. In the third grade, when Jake admitted he liked Emma, he violated the boys' code of honor.
It was all in a day's work.
The various orchards' yields were recorded in the journal.
Jill found her parents' enthusiasm disturbing.
ALSO: Use 1970s or 1980s, rather than 1970's, 1980's.

Numbers

Most of the time in fiction numbers are spelled out, so when writing fiction, avoid numerals. In nonfiction, spell out numbers one to ten; use numerals for 11 and above. Examples:

He saw that someone had placed five red chairs in a row.

In a year's time, Edie composed 33 new songs.

Exceptions:

For round numbers, spell out; e.g., a hundred, one thousand, a million.

For percents, use a numeral, plus "percent" spelled out; e.g., 7 percent.

Never begin a sentence with a numeral. Always spell the number out.

If a paragraph contains a lot of numbers, be sure to be consistent: Either spell them all out or use numerals for all of them.

Other Dialogue Punctuation

In dialogue, characters may sometimes quote someone or something, or they may ask a question. Here are some additional dialogue punctuation examples:

"It's possible that you took this the wrong way," Jason said. "It's possible."

"So you are claiming this was my fault?" Shelley said carefully.

"Well, all she said was, 'Whatever,'" he answered.

"Whatever."

"Yes."

"Oh, of course that isn't enough to question her judgment!" Shelley said. "Of course I was expecting too much. Of course it was wrong of me to expect someone who is taking care of my child to think that his allergies deserve more than a 'whatever.' Silly me."

Possessives/Contractions

It's = It is Its = possessive Examples:

It's a windy day. The pine is shedding its needles.

They're = They are Their = possessive There = place Examples:

They're gone for the winter. Their nest is abandoned. It was right over there.

You're = You are Your = possessive Examples:

You're not well. Let me check your pulse.

GREAT RESOURCES FOR STYLE MATTERS:

Strunk & White's Elements of Style. This has been a great compendium of info on all things grammatical and "punctuation-al" for over 50 years. There's a very cute illustrated version that makes it more enjoyable: *The Elements of Style [Illustrated],* Strunk, White, and Kalman (New York: Penguin, 2007). ISBN 0143112724.

Chicago Manual of Style. This is the style bible for many publishers; it's a huge book and covers almost every language-related matter known to humankind. The latest edition is now out: *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th ed.,* University of Chicago Press Staff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). ISBN 0226104206.

Important Works on Writing and Creativity — Instructor: Paula Cizmar

THE WRITING LIFE, Annie Dillard
A collection of gorgeous essays by this writer of elegant prose; some of the essays address writing directly, some of them are metaphors for the creative spirit.

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE NOVEL, Jane Smiley
An utterly comprehensive exploration of what makes a novel, its various components, the thought that goes into writing, and writerly advice from this master novelist. This is a big book, one to delve into slowly and intensively.

ON BECOMING A NOVELIST and THE ART OF FICTION, John Gardner
Two superb books about writing, using language, creating a personal writing style by the author of *Grendel*, *The Sunlight Dialogues*, and *October Light*. Had he not died prematurely in a motorcycle crash in 1982, Gardner would be one of the best-known American authors today.

ON TEACHING AND WRITING FICTION, Wallace Stegner
From a master novelist and master teacher (he headed the writing program at Stanford) comes a book full of ideas on what the reader expects and the tools the author needs to become a fine writer.

ONE WRITER'S BEGINNINGS, Eudora Welty
A wonderful, insightful, and at times elegiac look at what drives a writer to begin writing and the useful tools necessary to keep going.

ON WRITING WELL, William Zinsser.
This is one of the most helpful books for correcting writing errors and avoiding problems by an author who himself was an editor, literary critic, and writing teacher.

LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET, Rainer Maria Rilke
Always a wonderful book to return to again and again, Rilke's letters are an encouraging pep-talk when it seems easier to just give up.

ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL, E.M. Forster
Forster's book is based on lectures he gave at Cambridge in 1927 and his observations on writing—creating suspense, developing character, using rhythm and pace—are pure genius and eternally helpful.

MAKING A LITERARY LIFE. Carolyn See
This wonderful book from California's own Carolyn See is full of insights into writing, as well as thoughts on how to motivate yourself to keep doing it.

SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM. Italo Calvino.
Calvino's mind wanders into the zone of the creative, the metaphoric, the thinking of big thoughts—and at times this tiny book seems overwhelming; but it's a magnificent tour de force and worth reading when you need to be meditative about art.

WRITING IN RESTAURANTS and THREE USES OF THE KNIFE, David Mamet
In his inimitable style, David Mamet muses on writing, creating conflict, and maintaining the interest of the audience. Though he is a playwright, the advice is useful to writers in any form.

READING WHILE WRITING/READING FOR WRITING:
A LIST FOR WRITERS

<u>On Writing - Inspiration</u>
ZEN IN THE ART OF WRITING: ESSAYS ON CREATIVITY, Ray Bradbury
WRITING DOWN THE BONES, Natalie Goldberg
BIRD BY BIRD, Anne Lamott
LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET, Rainer Maria Rilke
ONE WRITER'S BEGINNINGS, Eudora Welty

<u>On Writing – The Writing Life</u>
THE WRITING LIFE, Annie Dillard
MAKING A LITERARY LIFE. Carolyn See

<u>On Writing – Art and Craft</u>
WEN FU: THE ART OF WRITING, Lu Chi (trans. by Sam Hamill)
ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL, E.M. Forster
THE ART OF FICTION, John Gardner
ON BECOMING A NOVELIST, John Gardner
THE SITUATION AND THE STORY, Vivian Gornick * memoirist
ON WRITING: A MEMOIR OF THE CRAFT, Stephen King
THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A NOVEL, Jane Smiley
ON TEACHING AND WRITING FICTION, Wallace Stegner
WRITING WITH STYLE, John Trimble
ON WRITING WELL, William Zinsser

Wrtng X -1 Personal Brainstorming © P. Cizmar 2005

NOTE: Writing exercises are for you and you only. Don't turn them in, but instead, use them as a way to get yourself warmed up, to free your imagination, get past any mental blocks you may have about getting started or about a particular piece that is driving you crazy; use them also to "un-freeze" any fixations you may have about character or story or an idea that has you baffled. These are meant to be written fast, instinctively, impulsively, with not a lot of thought. If you end up with something you really like and want to use, great. If you don't, at least you exercised your writing muscles, which makes getting down to the real work of a piece so much easier. So relax, just flow with it.

Warmup:
Download your brain for several minutes. Just start writing automatically, nonstop, about anything that comes into your head. Don't stop to think. Just write. If your mind is a blank, write anyway, even if you have to write "My mind is a blank, my mind is a blank" over and over and over again.

The Exercise:

1. Give yourself 15-20 minutes for the following: Look around at the room in which you are writing. Now describe it as it might have looked ten years ago. Then fifty years ago. Then one hundred years ago. Then three hundred years ago. Was it always a building? Is it now a modern house but at one time was an old Victorian? Was this place once a forest? Open meadow? Landfill? If you don't know....just let your imagination take over. Go back in time in your very own room.

2. Take a walk, or move to another room in the house, or another section of your office. Take a moment to gather sensory information. (Find a scent, a taste, etc.) Fill in the blanks:

I see __________. I hear __________. I taste __________.
I touch ___________. I smell __________.

Allow these sensory impressions to rest in your imagination awhile…and remain open to any images, memories, ideas they provoke. Write down any stories that come to you, or any characters that emerge.

UCLAx Getting to the Heart of the Story:
A Story & Structure Workshop Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Story Strategy/Fuel Resource List

Updating of myths, fables, biblical stories, fairy tales
- Masked
- Undisguised

Fact into fiction/autobiography
- Altering events/open mind
- Letting go of the research
- Current events—avoiding dating the script

Rituals
- E.g., mass or church service, tea ceremony, sporting event, funeral or wedding, dance
- Following recognized ritual steps and stages
- Altering ritual steps or order, etc.

Psychological issues/themes
- E.g., oedipal complex, coming of age, identity search, sexual roles, pathologies (neuroses or psychoses), etc.
- Jungian dream elements

Adaptation
- Securing rights
- The art of leaving out

Theme/Problem solving
- Abstract concept/message—selecting event to dramatize it
- Applying WHAT IF to personal, local, or global problems
- Asking HOW TO

Classical heroes/heroines as models
- E.g., Odysseus, Medea, Antigone, Lear, Othello, Arlechino, etc.

Creative Writing: Some Notes on Process © 2005 P. Cizmar

Intuition ⟷ Technique

Art and craft, intuition and technique, work hand in hand in the writing process, particularly in the writing of scripts. At different points along the way, one aspect may seem to be taking precedence over the other...but the other never entirely disappears. They inform each other. They are not separate, they are not identical, but they are in harmony.

As you create a story or script, you work through the following:

INTUITIVE ASPECTS OF WRITING

Brainstorming ideas, images, impressions

Search for characters
- "Found" characters
- Character banks

Monologues
- Character exploration monologues (to uncover story, etc.)
- Character voice monologues

Writing exercises...
- that identify issues, themes
- that illuminate struggle, wants, hidden agendas
- that test characters
- that explore sensory elements/that explore subtext

Experimental scenes/sections
- To reach beyond the initial intent
- To follow the imagination

TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF WRITING

Assessment of raw materials
- Recurring themes, images?
- How to construct a story and structure from existing materials?

Focus & planning (including charts and/or outlines)

Assembling your raw materials

Identifying:
- What is missing/what needs to be written
- How to weave scenes and/or sections
- Where and what to rewrite

Final analysis and polish

On the post-modern distrust of language....

In the modern language games of Wittgenstein, words are the very fundamentals of conscious existence, yet they are also severed from things and from truth. They exist in a world of their own. In modern structural linguistics, words have no inherent sense, for they can be reduced, every single one of them, to basic quasi-mathematical units. The fantasy of a basic number of irreducible elements out of which all speech can be constituted is a dissecting technique of the analytic mind which applies logical atomism to *logos* itself—a suicide of the word.

Of course there is a credibility gap, since we no longer trust words of any sort as true carriers of meaning....Of course we live in a world of slogan, jargon, and press releases, approximating the "newspeak" of Orwell's *1984.*

As one art and academic field after another falls into the paralyzing coils of obsession with language and communication, speech succumbs to a new semantic anxiety....

A new angelology of words is needed so that we may once again have faith in them. Without the inherence of the angel in the word—and *angel* means originally "emissary," "message-bearer"—how can we utter anything but personal opinions, things made up in our subjective minds? How can anything of worth and soul be conveyed from one psyche to another, as in a conversation, a letter, or a book, if archetypal significances are not carried in the depths of our words?

We need to recall the angel aspect of the word, recognizing words as independent carriers of soul between people. We need to recall that we do not just make words up or learn them in school, or ever have them fully under control. Words, like angels, are powers which have invisible power over us. They are personal presences which have whole mythologies: genders, genealogies (etymologies concerning origins and creations), histories, and vogues; and their own guarding, blaspheming, creating, and annihilating effects. *For words are persons.* This aspect of the word transcends their nominalistic definitions and evokes in our souls a universal resonance.

--James Hillman, *A Blue Fire*

The Soul's Code
Healing Fictions

Excerpt from:
"Social Animal – How the new sciences of human nature can help make sense of a life" by David Brooks *The New Yorker* January 17, 2011

[He's "quoting" a "neuroscientist" he has named Harold—really, it's a composite of many current theorists.]

"I guess I used to think of myself as a lone agent, who made certain choices and established certain alliances with colleagues and friends," he said. "Now, though, I see things differently. I believe we inherit a great river of knowledge, a flow of patterns coming from many sources. The information that comes from deep in the evolutionary past we call genetics. The information passed along from hundreds of years ago we call culture. The information passed along from decades ago we call family, and the information offered months ago we call education. But it is all information that flows through us. The brain is adapted to the river of knowledge and exists only as a creature in that river. Our thoughts are profoundly molded by this long historic flow, and none of us exists, self-made, in isolation from it.

"And though history has made us self-conscious in order to enhance our survival prospects, we still have deep impulses to erase the skull lines in our head and become immersed directly in the river. I've come to think that flourishing consists of putting yourself in situations in which you lose self-consciousness and become fused with other people, experiences, or tasks. It happens sometimes when you are lost in a hard challenge, or when an artist or a craftsman becomes one with the brush or the tool. It happens sometimes while you're playing sports, or listening to music or lost in a story, or to some people when they feel enveloped by God's love. And it happens most when we connect with other people. I've come to think that happiness isn't really produced by conscious accomplishments. Happiness is a measure of how thickly the unconscious parts of our minds are intertwined with other people and with activities. Happiness is determined by how much information and affection flows through us covertly every day and year."

The Magical Realists,
(· 100 Yrs. of Solitude

Thoughts on how to keep the reader interested over the course of a complete work…

Some authors deploy their modes of seduction more gracefully than others, but what they are all trying to achieve in the reader is what length itself demands: willing suspension of disbelief. There are two halves to this equation: "willing" and "suspension of disbelief." It is far more difficult to make the second half work than the first, because no amount of plausibility really overcomes the definition of a novel as fiction.

Usually, what puts a reader into a state of willingness is an interesting assertion, such as "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (*Pride and Prejudice*), or "Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*), or "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (*A Tale of Two Cities*). But a character may also do an interesting or appealing thing, such as "Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in a single file (As I Lay Dying)….At the beginning of *The Metamorphosis,* Kafka has Gregor Samsa change into a bug, perhaps one of the most intriguing first premises in literature.

Willing suspension of disbelief is a strange state of mind—reading nonfiction does not require it and neither does reading poetry, since both are based on logical argument. Many intelligent and educated persons resist it entirely or yield to it only for a brief time, in the darkness of a theater, accompanied by other members of an audience—the world is full of people who are rather proud that they don't read novels…A literary education not only enlarges a reader's willingness to suspend disbelief by extending her range of pleasures, it also strengthens her ability to enter the meditative state, and to be receptive to the influence of another human mind, because it is a state of contemplation that is essential to the true appreciation of the novel. While all art forms promote this state of receptivity, with the novel it is uniquely sustained—it is not possible, for example, to contemplate a painting for ten or twelve hours, the amount of time the average reader would need to read a five-hundred page novel….

For some readers, of course, eight to ten hours spent reading a novel in a receptive state of mind is the only quiet, contemplative time they can afford, and the opportunity to suspend so much disbelief, to follow a single line of thought, is comforting as well as entertaining and enlightening. When the reader accepts the first line of a book, she agrees to think about the same things, and in the same degree of detail and in the same order, that the writer has chosen to think about….

However, not every state of willing suspension of disbelief is the same. A novel directs the reader's contemplation of it….every novel, then, is a guided meditation on a common thing, common both in the sense of "mundane" and in the sense of "shared"…It is hard to overestimate the importance of this quality of commonness to the nature of the novel. It enables a reader to relax with a novel as with another person, and also to feel as though the novelist might have something to say of relevance to the reader's own common life.

--Jane Smiley, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*

Making a Literary Life
Carolyn See

Golden Days
There Will Never Be Another U.

In "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction" poet Wallace Stevens lists such a fiction's essential qualities. His list: 1. It must be abstract 2. It must change 3. It must give pleasure. Late in life, he remarked elsewhere that he would add a fourth quality: "It must be human."...

"**It must be abstract**". Abstraction forces a gap between word and thing. It requires us to step back and imagine things otherwise, completing a picture whose meaning is not pre-packaged into "message." It creates plural configurations of possibility....

Which leads me to Wallace Steven's second requirement for the fiction he dreamed of: **"It must change."** The possibility of change defies inevitability's coercive narrative, demanding choice at whatever level is still possible. Documents are stuffed into coat linings, children passed through windows into strangers' hands—an arrow is shot into the future, to the no-when of choice's return. The tension in story-telling or performance lies in the possibility of derailment—the trapeze artist might fall. The lovers might not reconcile. The end game is not pre-ordained. It's a time-based art-form and so holds our mortality in its hand like an egg.

From: **"Notes Toward a Political Theatre" by Christine Evans**
Talk given at the Arts in One World Conference, Brown University, March 21, 2010

Ask Tom H.
~~around~~ about Chris Wood.

James Hillman, *Insearch*, quoted in *A Blue Fire,* pp 17 - 18:

Anthropologists describe a condition among "primitive" peoples called "loss of soul." In this condition a man is out of himself, unable to find either the outer connection between humans or the inner connection to himself. He is unable to take part in his society, its rituals, and traditions. They are dead to him, he to them. His connectivity to family, totem, nature, is gone. Until he regains his soul he is not a true human. He is "not there." It is as if he had never been initiated, been given a name, come into real being. His soul may not only be lost; it may also be possessed, bewitched, ill, transposed into an object, animal, place or another person. Without his soul, he has lost the sense of belonging and the sense of being in communion with the powers and the gods. They no longer reach him; he cannot pray, nor sacrifice, nor dance. His personal myth and his connection to the larger myth of his people, as *raison d'etre*, is lost. Yet he is not sick with disease, nor is he out of his mind. He has simply lost his soul. He may even die. We become lonely. Other relevant parallels with ourselves today need not be spelled out.

One day in Burghölzi, the famous institute in Zurich where the words *schizophrenia* and *complex* were born, I watched a woman being interviewed. She sat in a wheelchair because she was elderly and feeble. She said that she was dead for she had lost her heart. The psychiatrist asked her to place her hand over her breast to feel her heart beating: it must still be there if she could feel its beat. "That," she said, "is not my real heart." She and the psychiatrist looked at each other. There was nothing more to say. Like the primitive who lost his soul, she had lost the loving courageous connection to life—and that is the real heart, not the ticker which can as well pulsate isolated in a glass bottle.

Jack Kerouac's

BELIEF & TECHNIQUE FOR MODERN PROSE

List of Essentials

- Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
- Submissive to everything, open, listening
- Try never get drunk outside yr own house
- Be in love with yr life
- Something that you feel will find its own form
- Be crazy dumbsaint of the mind
- Blow as deep as you want to blow
- Write what you want bottomless from bottom of mind
- The unspeakable visions of the individual
- No time for poetry but exactly what is
- Visionary tics shivering in the chest
- In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
- Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
- Like Proust be an old teahead of time
- Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
- The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
- Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
- Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
- Accept loss forever
- Believe in the holy contour of life
- Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
- Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better
- Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
- No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
- Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
- Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
- In Praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
- Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
- You're a Genius all the time
- Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven

As ever,
Jack

Jack Kerouac, "Belief & Technique For Modern Prose: List of Essentials," from a 1958 letter to Don Allen [possibly based on something Kerouac wrote for Allen Ginsberg], in *Heaven & Other Poems*, copyright © 1958, 1977, 1983. Grey Fox Press.

Excerpts from *The Book of Disquiet*

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To write is to forget. Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life. Music soothes, the visual arts exhilarate, and the performing arts (such as acting and dance) entertain. Literature, however, retreats from life by turning it into a slumber. The other arts make no such retreat–some because they are visible and hence vital formulas, others because they live from human life itself.

This isn't the case with literature. Literature simulates life. A novel is a story of what never was, and a play is a novel without narration. A poem is the expression of ideas or feelings in a language no one uses, because no one talks in verse.

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It's a rule of life that we can, and should, learn from everyone. There are solemn and serious things we can learn from quacks and crooks, there are philosophies taught us by fools, there are lessons in faithfulness and justice brought to us by chance and by those we chance to meet. Everything is in everything.

In certainly particularly lucid moments of contemplation, like those of early afternoon when I observantly wander through the streets, each person brings me a novelty, each building teaches me something new, each placard has a message for me.

My silent stroll is a continual conversation, and all of us–men, buildings, stones, placards and sky–are a huge friendly crowd, elbowing each other with words in the great procession of Destiny.

Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet (A Factless Autobiography).* Translated by Richard Zenith. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

From A HISTORY OF THE WORLD by Julian Barnes

History isn't what happened. History is just what historians tell us. There was a pattern, a plan, a movement, expansion, the march of democracy; it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected, explicable. One good story leads to another. First it was kings and archbishops with some offstage divine tinkering, then it was the march of ideas and the movements of masses, then little local events which mean something bigger, but all the time it's connections, progress, meaning, this led to this, this happened because of this. And we, the readers of history, the sufferers from history, we can scan the pattern for hopeful conclusions, for the way ahead. And we cling to history as a series of salon pictures, conversation pieces whose participants we can easily imagine back into life, when all the time it's more like a multi-media collage, with paint applied by decorator's roller rather than camel-hair brush.

The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade; stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent connections...We make up a story to cover up the facts we don't know or can't accept; we keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them. Our panic and our pain are only eased by soothing fabulation; we call it history.

There's one thing I'll say for history. It's very good at finding things. We try to cover them up but history doesn't let go. It's got time on its side, time and science. We bury our victims in secrecy (strangled princelings, irradiated reindeer) but history discovers what we did to them. We lost the Titanic, forever it seemed, in the squid-ink depths, but they turned it up. They found the wreck of the Medusa not long ago, off the coast of Mauretania. There wasn't any hope of salvage, they knew that; and all they salvaged after a hundred and seventy-five years were a few copper nails from the frigate's hull and a couple of cannon. But they went and found it just the same.

*   *   *

Just as our account of a dream is not at all the same as our experience of actually dreaming it, so too reading fiction produces responses and mental processes which are too complex ever to be fully captured in the discussion we have when we have finished reading. This does not make such discussion pointless: learning to study the novel helps us to refine and extend our reading experiences, and it allows us to turn the experience of reading into knowledge and self-knowledge through ordered and rational discussion. That said, we should never be ashamed to admit that the reading of stories is a **mysterious process,** only a part of which can be held on to and brought into the light of day through analysis and interpretive discussion.
From STUDYING THE NOVEL by Jeremy Hawthorn

"There is such a place as fairyland - but only children can find the way to it. And they do not know that it is fairyland until they have grown so old that they forget the way. One bitter day, when they seek it and cannot find it, they realize what they have lost; and that is the tragedy of life. On that day the gates of Eden are shut behind them and the age of gold is over.

Henceforth they must dwell in the common light of common day. Only a few, who remain children at heart, can ever find that fair, lost path again; and blessed are they above mortals. They, and only they, can bring us tidings from that dear country where we once sojourned and from which we must evermore be exiles. The world calls them its singers and poets and artists and story-tellers; but they are just people who have never forgotten the way to fairyland."

— L.M. Montgomery

For example, the wind has its reasons. We just don't notice as we go about our lives. But then, at some point, we are made to notice. The wind envelops you with a certain purpose in mind, and it rocks you. The wind knows everything that's inside you. And not just the wind. Everything, including a stone. They all know us very well. From top to bottom. It only occurs to us at certain times. And all we can do is go with those things. As we take them in, we survive, and deepen.

— Haruki Murakami, *Hear the Wind Sing,* translated by Alfred Birnbaum, Kodansha English Library, 1987.

(In his new book, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* Salman Rushdie tells the story of how he lived under an assumed name after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against him because of the publication of his book, *The Satanic Verses*. In "The Disappeared," an excerpt from the memoir in *The New Yorker*, Rushdie talks about the origins of his novel and tells how he studied history at Cambridge under the tutelage of the noted medievalist Arthur Hibbert. Note: Rushdie speaks of himself in the third person.)

At the beginning of their work together, Hibbert gave him a piece of advice he never forgot. "You must never write history," he [Hibbert] said, "until you can hear the people speak." He thought about that for years, and it came to feel like a valuable guiding principle for fiction as well. If you didn't have a sense of how people spoke, you didn't know them well enough, and so you couldn't—you shouldn't—tell their story. They way people spoke, in short, clipped phrases or long, flowing rambles, revealed so much about them: their place of origin, their social class, their temperament, whether calm or angry, warm hearted or cold-blooded, foulmouthed or polite; and, beneath their temperament, their true nature, intellectual or earthy, plainspoken or devious, and yes, good or bad. If that had been all he learned at Arthurs' feet, it would have been enough.

From "The Disappeared," by Salman Rushdie, in *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2012.

from: "PROFILES: THE DEAD ARE REAL – Hilary Mantel's imagination"
by Larissa MacFarquhar *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2012

When she wakes in the morning, she likes to start writing right away, before she speaks, because whatever remnants sleep has left are the gift her brain has given her for the day. Her dream life is important to the balance of her mind: it's the place where she experiences disorder. Her dreams are archetypal, mythological, enormous, full of pageantry—there are knights and monsters. She has been to the crusades in her dreams more than once.

When she's starting a new book, she needs to feel her way inside the characters, to know what it's like to be them. There 's a trick she uses sometimes, which another writer taught her. Sit quietly and withdraw your attention from the room you're in until you're focused inside your mind. Imagine a chair and invite your character to come and sit in it; once he is comfortable, you may ask him questions. She tried this for the first time when she was writing *The Giant, O'Brien*: the giant came in, but, before sitting down in the chair, he bent down and tested it, to see if it would take his weight. On that occasion, she never got any further, because she was so excited that she punched the air and shouted "Yes!" But from then on she could imagine herself in the giant's body.

So much of fiction is a matter of trying to force uncertainty and freedom into a process that is in fact entirely determined by choice or events. When she is writing historical fiction, she knows what will happen and can do nothing about it, but she must try to imagine the events as if the outcome were not yet fixed, from the perspective of the characters, who are moving forward in ignorance. This is not just an emotional business of entering the characters' point of view; it is also a matter of remembering that at every point things could have been different. What she, the author, knows is history, not fate.

When she is writing ordinary fiction, she has complete power over what happens, but she must feel that her characters have free will or else the dead hand of determinism will crush the book. She must feel that her control of them is partial—so light that it is barely sensed. Sometimes one of her characters will say something and it seems to her that she has no idea what is going to be said back until suddenly she does, because there it is, on the page. When this happens, she knows the process is working.

She finds this lightness, this relinquishing of control, difficult to achieve, especially since it cannot be accomplished by simple effort. Her mind does not naturally float about without direction; it is a machine designed for analytic thought. "I like my world, and particularly my inner world, to be organized," she says. "I like filing systems. But the whole process of writing novels is the opposite of that—it's do not label, do not define, do not decide, leave everything loose. You have to say to yourself, I take my hands off, I let my unconscious work for me. It's desperately uncomfortable! There's one whole side of my nature that makes me the least likely novelist in the world: the person who insists on getting the historical facts all lined up, and who feels that there's immense security in a good card index."

Excerpt: **Writing in the Dark, David Grossman,** *New York Times*, May 13 2007

"As soon as one writes," Natalia Ginzburg says, "one miraculously ignores the current circumstances of one's life, yet our happiness or misery leads us to write in a certain way. When we are happy, our imagination is more dominant. When miserable, the power of our memory takes over."

…I write. In wake of the death of my son Uri last summer in the war between Israel and Lebanon, the awareness of what happened has sunk into every cell of mine. The power of memory is indeed enormous and heavy, and at times has a paralyzing quality to it. Nevertheless, the act of writing itself at this time creates for me a type of "space," a mental territory that I've never experienced before, where death is not only the absolute and one-dimensional negation of life.

Writers know that when we write, we feel the world move; it is flexible, crammed with possibilities. It certainly isn't frozen. Wherever human existence permeates, there is no freezing and no paralysis, and actually, there is no status quo. Even if we sometimes err to think that there is a status quo; even if some are very keen to have us believe that a status quo exists. When I write, even now, the world is not closing in on me, and it does not grow ever so narrow: it also makes gestures of opening up toward a future prospect.

I write. I imagine. The act of imagining in itself enlivens me. I am not frozen and paralyzed before the predator. I invent characters. At times I feel as if I am digging up people from the ice in which reality enshrouded them, but maybe, more than anything else, it is myself that I am now digging up….

I write, and I feel how the correct and precise use of words is sometimes like a remedy to an illness. Like a contraption for purifying the air, I breathe in and exhale the murkiness and manipulations of linguistic scoundrels and language rapists of all shades and colors. I write and I feel how the tenderness and intimacy I maintain with language, with its different layers, its eroticism and humor and soul, give me back the person I used to be, me, before my self became nationalized and confiscated by the conflict, by governments and armies, by despair and tragedy.

I write. I relieve myself of one of the dubious and distinctive capacities created by the state of war in which I live — the capacity to be an enemy and an enemy only. I do my best not to shield myself from the just claims and sufferings of my enemy. Nor from the tragedy and entanglement of his own life. Nor from his errors or crimes or from the knowledge of what I myself am doing to him. Nor, finally, from the surprising similarities I find between him and me.

All of a sudden I am not condemned to this absolute, fallacious and suffocating dichotomy — this inhumane choice to "be victim or aggressor," without having any third, more humane alternative. When I write, I can be a human being whose parts have natural and vital passages between them; a human who is able to feel close to his enemies' sufferings and to acknowledge his just claims without relinquishing a grain of his own identity.

Speeches & Lectures

About My Writing

Often people ask me how much truth is there in my books, and how much I have invented. I could swear that every word is true. If it has not happened, it certainly will. I can no longer trace a line between reality and fantasy. Before I was called a liar, now that I make a living with these lies, I am called a writer. May be we should simply stick to poetic truth.

In his Book of Embraces, Eduardo Galeano has a story that I love. To me it is a splendid metaphor of writing. "There was an old and solitary man who spent most of his time in bed. There were rumors that he had a treasure hidden in his house. One day some thieves broke in, they searched everywhere and found a chest in the cellar. They went off with it and when they opened it they found that it was filled with letters. They were the love letters the old man had received all over the course of his long life. The thieves were going to burn the letters, but they talked it over and finally decided to return them. One by one. One a week. Since then, every Monday at noon, the old man would be waiting for the postman to appear. As soon as he saw him, he would start running and the postman, who knew all about it, held the letter in his hand. And even St. Peter could hear the beating of that heart, crazed with joy at receiving a message from a woman."

Isn't this the playful substance of literature?... An event transformed by poetic truth. Writers are like those good thieves, they take something that is real, like the letters, and by a trick of magic they transform it into something totally fresh. That is the best part of writing: finding the hidden treasures, giving sparkle to worn out events, invigorating the tired soul with imagination, creating some kind of truth with many lies.

Good fiction is not only the thrill of a plot, at its best it is an invitation to explore beyond the appearance of things, it challenges the reader's safety, it questions reality. Yes, it can be disturbing. But there may be a reward at the end. With some luck, the author and the reader, hand in hand, may stumble upon some particles of truth. Usually, however, that is not the intention of the author in the first place. The writer merely suffers from an uncontrollable need to tell the story. There is nothing more to it, believe me.

Δ Co,
Dear Madame = retired claim woman on mining

"Flipped"

Through letters, there is no road too difficult to travel, no idea too confusing to be ordered. It comes like rain from clouds; it renews the vital spirit. Inscribed on bronze and marble, it honors every virtue. It sings in flute and strings and every day is made newer.
--Lu Chi, *Wen Fu: The Art of Writing*, 200 A.D.

Imagination is casting off mooring ropes, taking one's chances that there will be new mooring posts in the vastness ahead. In creative endeavors, imagination operates in juxtaposition with form. When these endeavors are successful, it is because imagination infuses form with its own vitality. The question is: How far can we let our imagination loose? Can we give it rein? Dare we think the unthinkable? Dare to conceive of, and move among, new visions?"
--Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*

The old adage about the poet's role in, or his duty to, his society puts the entire issue upside down. By writing...in the language of his society, a poet takes a large step toward it. It is society's job to meet him halfway, that is, to open his book and read it...

By failing to read or listen to poets, a society dooms itself to inferior modes of articulation--of the politician, or the salesman, or the charlatan--in short, to its own. It forfeits...its own evolutionary potential.
--Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, 1996

... No one can stop us from imagining another kind of future, one that departs from the terrible cataclysms of violent conflict, of hateful divisions, poverty, and suffering. Let us begin to imagine the worlds we would like to inhabit, the long lives we will share, and the many futures in our hands.
–Susan Griffin, "Can Imagination Save Us?" *Whole Earth Review*

"The first thing to notice in a creative act is that it is an encounter."

"Imagination is the outreach of mind. It is the individual's capacity to accept the bombardment of the conscious mind with ideas, impulses, images, and every other sort of psychic phenomena welling up from the preconscious. It is the capacity to 'dream dreams and see visions,' to consider diverse possibilities, and to endure the tension involved in holding these possibilities before one's attention. Imagination is casting off mooring ropes, taking one's chances that there will be new mooring posts in the vastness ahead. In creative endeavors, imagination operates in juxtaposition with form. When these endeavors are successful, it is because imagination infuses form with its own vitality. The question is: How far can we let our imagination loose? Can we give it rein? Dare we think the unthinkable? Dare to conceive of, and move among, new visions?"
--Rollo May, The Courage to Create, pp 120-121

...as psychologist James Hillman teaches, images are doorways to the infinite. There are two unavoidable qualities to any image: the image is more than you, even though you thought of it--it is itself, with an identity that transcends the personal; and it always can lead to another image--it has no end. Whether the image is a flower, or a door, or a man in a black coat, or a word written in lipstick on a mirror--all these images, any image you can have, clearly have a life of their own and, if dwelled on, inevitably lead to other images, beyond your conscious control. Which is to say, as Hillman and Jung do say, image is pure psyche, the psyche expressing itself in its purest form. (Dreams are images.) To do a ritual, to revel in the revelatory, is to enter the image.

—Michael Ventura, "The Revel in Revelation," in LETTERS AT 3 A.M.

There are metaphors more real than the people who walk in the street. There are images tucked away in books that live more vividly than many men and women. There are phrases from literary works that have a positively human personality. There are passages from my own writing that chill me with fright, so distinctly do I feel them as people, so sharply outlined do they appear against the walls of my room, at night, in shadows..... I've written sentences whose sound, read out loud or silently (impossible to hide their sound), can only be of something that acquired absolute exteriority and a full-fledged soul."

—Fernando Pessoa, THE BOOK OF DISQUIET *(Pessoa was a Portuguese poet and literary critic.)*

The winged word. The mercurial word. The word that is both moth and lamp. The word that is itself and more. The associative word light with meanings. The word not netted by meaning. The exact word wide. The word not whore nor cenobite. The word unlied.

—Jeanette Winterson, ART & LIES

To write or even speak English is not a science but an art. There are no reliable words. Whoever writes English is involved in a struggle that never lets up even for a sentence. He is struggling against vagueness, against obscurity, against the lure of the decorative adjective, against the encroachment of Latin and Greek, and, above all, against the worn-out phrases and dead metaphors with which the language is cluttered up.

—George Orwell (1903 - 1950)

A poem records emotions and moods that lie beyond normal language, that can only be patched together and hinted at metaphorically.

—Diane Ackerman (1948 -)

Neanderthal man listened to stories, if one may judge by the shape of his skull. The primitive audience was an audience of shock-heads, gaping round the campfire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or woolly rhinoceros, and only kept awake by suspense. What would happen next? The novelist droned on, and as soon as the audience guessed what happened next, they either fell asleep or killed him. We can estimate the dangers incurred when we think of the career of Scheherazade in somewhat later times. Scheherazade avoided her fate because she knew how to wield the weapon of suspense--the only literary tool that has any effect upon tyrants and savages.
--E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 1927

In most good stories, it is the character's personality that creates the action of the story. If you start with a real personality, a real character, then something is bound to happen.
--Flannery O'Connor, Writing Short Stories

Character is a product of combinations.
--Roland Barthes, S/Z: An Essay

Writing a story or a novel is one way of discovering sequence in experience...Experiences too indefinite of outline in themselves to be recognized for themselves connect and are identified as a larger shape. And suddenly a light is thrown back, as when your train makes a curve, showing that there has been a mountain of meaning rising behind you on the way you've come, is rising there still, proven now through retrospect...Writing fiction has developed in me an abiding respect for the unknown in a human lifetime and a sense of where to look for the threads, how to follow, how to connect, find in the thick of the tangle what clear line persists. The strands are all there: to the memory, nothing is ever really lost.
--Eudora Welty, One Writer's Beginnings, 1983.

People have (with the help of conventions) oriented all their solutions toward the easy and toward the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must hold to what is difficult; everything alive holds to it; everything in Nature grows and defends itself in its own way and is characteristically and spontaneously itself, seeks at all costs to be so and against all opposition. We know little, but that we must hold to what is difficult is a certainty that will not forsake us; it is good to be solitary, for solitude is difficult; that something is difficult must be a reason the more for us to do it.
-- Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, 1904.

Lit Tues.- 1-4
Class here

Where are we going… No one knows…

This is one of the most singular experiences, waking on what feels like a good day, preparing to work but not yet actually embarked. At this moment there are infinite possibilities, whole hours ahead. Her mind hums. This morning she may penetrate the obfuscation, the clogged pipes, to reach the gold. She can feel it inside her, an all but indescribable second self, or rather a parallel, purer self. If she were religious, she would call it the soul. It is more than the sum of her intellect and her emotions, more than the sum of her experiences, though it runs like veins of brilliant metal through all three. It is an inner faculty that recognizes the animating mysteries of the world because it is made of the same substance, and when she is very fortunate she is able to write directly through that faculty. Writing in that state is the most profound satisfaction she knows, but her access to it comes and goes without warning. She may pick up her pen and follow it with her hand as it moves across the paper; she may pick up her pen and find that she's merely herself, a woman in a housecoat holding a pen, afraid and uncertain, only mildly competent with no idea about where to begin or what to write.
She picks up her pen.
Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.
--Michael Cunningham, The Hours

From THE BOOK OF BEES, by Sue Hubbell, pp 69-70

The daffodils finally do bloom. They do every year, of course, although in some years when I want to get out among the bees it seems as though they never will. The golden blossoms surround my cabin, and they also march off in straight lines through the underbrush and scrubby sumac, wild cherry, and farkleberry which are the first advance growth of the woods that is closing in around my place. The widow from whom I bought this farm fifteen years ago laughed when she told me about those straight rows of daffodils. She had bought a burlap sack of bulbs, and had given them to her husband to plant.

"He tried digging holes for 'em by hand," she said, "but after a few he decided he weren't going to bother that hard, so he just hitched the cultivator to the mule and make him some long straight furrows and dropped in them daffodils. I thought they looked pretty funny, but I never did say anything, and now they make me think of him and his mule and that day and wish it were all now."

When I see those daffodils striding into the young woods, I like to try to create in my mind that day of theirs, too, and remember the good things they did to establish this farm where I have had bees and been happy. I've come to the belief that we manufacture whatever immortal souls we have out of the bits of difference we make by living in this world. It seems no bad thing to have a soul of yellow daffodils in lines across an Ozark hilltop.

From: THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS by Sarah Orne Jewett
Published: 1896

"Lord, hear the great breakers!" exclaimed Mrs. Todd. "How they pound!—there, there! I always run of an idea that the sea knows anger these nights and gets full o' fight. I can hear the rote o' them old black ledges way down the thoroughfare. Calls up all those stormy verses in the Book o' Psalms; David he knew how old sea-goin' folks have to quake at the heart."

I thought as I had never thought before of such anxieties. The families of sailors and coastwise adventurers by sea must always be worrying about somebody, this side of the world or the other. There was hardly one of Mrs. Todd's elder acquaintances, men or women, who had not at some time or other made a sea voyage, and there was often no news until the voyagers themselves came back to bring it.

...The coast of Maine was in former years brought so near to foreign shores by its busy fleet of ships that among the older men and women one still finds a surprising proportion of travelers. Each seaward-stretching headland with its high-set houses, each island of a single farm, has sent its spies to view many a Land of Eshcol; one may see plain, contented old faces at the windows, whose eyes have looked at far-away ports and known the splendors of the Eastern world. They shame the easy voyager of the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean; they have rounded the Cape of Good Hope and braved the angry seas of Cape Horn in small wooden ships; they have brought up their hardy boys and girls on narrow decks; they were among the last of the Northmen's children to go adventuring to unknown shores. More than this one cannot give to a young State for its enlightenment; the sea captains and captains' wives of Maine knew something of the wide world, and never mistook their native parishes for the whole instead of a part thereof; they knew not only Thomaston and Castine and Portland, but London and Bristol and Bordeaux, and strange-mannered harbors of the China sea.

Eshcol: A valley in which the spies obtained a fine cluster of grapes (Num. 13:23, 24; "the brook Eshcol," A.V.; "the valley of Eshcol," R.V.), which they took back with them to the camp of Israel as a specimen of the fruits of the Promised Land. On their way back they explored the route which led into the south (the Negeb) by the western edge of the mountains at Telilat el-'Anab, i.e., "grape-mounds", near Beersheba. "In one of these extensive valleys, perhaps in Wady Hanein, where miles of grape-mounds even now meet the eye, they cut the gigantic clusters of grapes, and gathered the pomegranates and figs, to show how goodly was the land which the Lord had promised for their inheritance.", from Palmer's *Desert of the Exodus*, cited on Wikipedia.

Mutual understanding in the world being nearly always, as now, at low ebb, it is comforting to remember that it is through art that one country can nearly always speak reliably to another, if the other can hear at all. Art, though, is never the voice of a country; it is an even more precious thing, the voice of the individual, doing its best to speak, not comfort of any sort, indeed, but truth. And the art that speaks it most unmistakably, most directly, most variously, most fully, is fiction; in particular, the novel.

Why? Because the novel from the start has been bound up in the local, the "real," the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience. Where the imagination comes in is in directing the use of all this. That use is endless, and there are only four words, of all the millions we've hatched, that a novel rules out: "Once upon a time." They make a story a fairy tale by the simple sweep of the remove—by abolishing the present and the place where we are instead of conveying them to us.

...Fiction is properly at work in the here and now, or the past made here and now; for in novels *we* have to be there. Fiction provides the ideal texture through which the feeling and meaning that permeate our own personal, present lives will best show through. For in his theme—the most vital and important part of the work at hand—the novelist has the blessing of the inexhaustible subject: you and me. You and me, here. Inside that generous scope and circumference—who could ask for anything more?—the novel can accommodate practically anything on earth; and has abundantly done so.
--"Writing and Analyzing Fiction," in *The Eye of the Story*, Eudora Welty. New York: Vintage Books.

NYC
{Hudson Theater
7 March, 4th}
SEVEN

Art, like dreaming, is something so necessary to internal balance that people deprived of it go a little wacky. Art is the collective dreamplace, the reservoir of our deepest understandings and desires and hopes, as essential as water. In recognition of this fact, the marketplace offers us entertainment, hoping to replace the wild and forested interior of our souls with potted plastic plants. Just as we dream—whether we want to or not, whether we long for or fear our dreaming—people make art and are drawn to art. It's just something our psyches need, even in the most life-denying environments conceivable—drawings made with burnt matches on cigarette papers in the secret prisons of the Argentine junta, poetry carved with nails into the walls of the Angel Island immigrant detention center in San Francisco Bay, songs passed along in whispers from half-buried cellars in the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. Every vital social movement immediately begins to generate art—songs, poetry, posters, murals, novels—an outpouring of the creativity that people will create from even the smallest crumbs of hope.

—Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), p. 129

But perhaps the answer that stands closest to my heart is something else: Think what it would be to have a work conceived from outside the *self*, a work that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language, to the bird perching on the edge of the gutter, to the tree in spring and the tree in fall, to stone, to cement, to plastic……

Was this not perhaps what Ovid was aiming at, when he wrote about the continuity of forms? And what Lucretius was aiming at when he identified himself with that nature common to each and every thing?

—from "Multiplicity," in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* by Italo Calvino

It is the poetic spirit (furabo), the spirit that leads one to follow nature and become friends with the things of the seasons. For a person who has spirit, everything he sees becomes a flower, and everything he imagines turns into a moon.
--Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)

From *The Situation and the Story* by Vivian Gornick

In all imaginative writing sympathy for the subject is necessary not because it is the politically correct or morally decent posture to adopt but because an absence of sympathy shuts down the mind: engagement fails, the flow of association dries up, and the work narrows. What I mean by sympathy is simply that level of empathic understanding that endows the subject with dimension. The empathy that allows us, the readers, to see the "other" as the other might see him or herself is the empathy that provides movement in writing. When someone writes a *Mommie Dearest* memoir—where the narrator is presented as innocent and the subject is a monster—the work fails because the situation remains static. For the drama to deepen, we must see the loneliness of the monster and the cunning of the innocent. Above all, it is the narrator who must complicate in order that the subject be given life.

In fiction, a cast of characters is put to work that will cover all the bases: some will speak the author's inclination, some the opposition—that is, some represent an idea of self, some the agonistic other; allow them all their say, and the writer moves into a dynamic. In nonfiction, the writer has only the singular self to work with. So it is the other in oneself that the writer must seek and find to create movement, achieve a dynamic. Inevitably, the piece builds only when the narrator is involved not in confession but in this kind of self-investigation, the kind that means to provide motion, purpose, and dramatic tension. Here, it is self-implication that is required. To see one's own part in the situation—that is, one's own frightened or cowardly or self-deceived part—is to create the dynamic.

It is a cliché of received folk wisdom that fiction is a form of lying. Being freed from the consequences which follow upon anything we say and do in the real world, the inventor of stories, of made-up situations, is free to indulge his most courageous fancies. In that sense, stories and plays are lies. Yet, in another sense, they are important truths. They tell us something about the fantasies of their authors, their daydreams and the visions which come to them when they give their imagination free rein. And such daydreams and imaginings and fantasies are truths which contain precious material about their creators' inner life and give us profound insights into the personality and psychology of the human beings who produce them. Every piece of fiction, therefore, growing as it does of its author's subconscious and conscious mind, is valuable as a human document.

...in drama the aim is an enhanced level of consciousness, a memorable insight into the nature of existence, a renewal of strength in the individual to face the world. In dramatic terms, catharsis. In religious terms, communion, enlightenment, illumination.
--*An Anatomy of Drama*, Martin Esslin

The hero's journey includes three major stages: preparation, the journey, and the return.

Whenever we lose our sense of integrity and wholeness or begin to feel inadequate to current life challenges, we must embark on the quest again.
--*Awakening the Heroes Within*, Carol S. Pearson

Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out.
--*Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.
--Michaelangelo

off Oct. 20th

From David Lodge's *The Art of Fiction*

Defamiliarization is the usual English translation of *ostranenie* (literally, "making strange"), another of those invaluable critical terms coined by the Russian Formalists. In a famous essay first published in 1917, Victor Shklovsky argued that the essential purpose of art is to overcome the deadening effect of habit by representing familiar things in unfamiliar ways:

> Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war…And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stony *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.

…What do we mean—it is a common term of praise—when we say that a book is "original"? Not, usually, that the writer has invented something without precedent, but that she has made us "perceive" what we already, in a conceptual sense, "know," by deviating from the conventional, habitual ways of representing reality. Defamiliarization, in short, is another word for "originality." p. 53

Novels are narratives, and narrative, whatever its medium—words, film, strip-cartoon—holds the interest of an audience by raising questions in their minds, and delaying the answers. The questions are broadly of two kinds, having to do with causality (e.g. whodunit?) and temporality (e.g. what will happen next?) each exhibited in a very pure form by the classic detective story and the adventure story. p. 14

[Even] in antiquity, storytellers perceived the interesting effects that could be obtained by deviating from chronological order. The classical epic began *in media res*, in the midst of the story. For example, the narrative of the Odyssey begins halfway through the hero's hazardous voyage home from the Trojan War, loops back to describe his earlier adventures, then follows the story to its conclusion to Ithaca. Through time-shift, narrative avoids presenting life as just one damn thing after another, and allows us to make connections of causality and irony between widely separated events. p. 75

Most narrative contains an element of surprise. If we can predict every twist in a plot, we are unlikely to be gripped by it. But the twists must be convincing as well as unexpected. Aristotle called this effect *peripetea,* or reversal, the sudden shift from one state of affairs to the opposite, often combined with "discovery," the transformation of a character's ignorance into knowledge. p.71

Author - David Lodge:
: Changing Places
Art of Fiction

How Michael Chabon wrote his first novel, **The Mysteries of Pittsburgh**

Let's say that I did write a novel. Your basic, old-fashioned, here-and-now novel. Where would I write it? Novels took time, I assumed. They must require long hours of uninterrupted work. I needed a place where I could set up my computer and spread out and get my daily work done without distraction: Ralph's room. It had served Ralph as a room of his own, as a secret mountain laboratory; perhaps it would serve me... His so-called room was in fact a crawl space, twice as long as it was wide, and it was not very wide. It had a cement floor and a naked light bulb...

I lugged my computer in there and up onto the workbench. It was an Osborne 1a. I had bought it in 1983 for all that was left of my bar mitzvah money plus everything I had managed to save since. It was the size of a portable sewing machine in its molded plastic case, with two five-and-a-quarter-inch floppy disk drives, no hard drive, and 64 KB of memory. At twenty-five pounds you could shlep it onto an airplane and it would just barely fit under the seat in front of you. Its screen was glowing green and slightly smaller than a three-by-five index card. It ran the CP/M operating system and had come bundled with a fine word processing program called WordStar. It never crashed, and it never failed, and I loved it immoderately. But when I hoisted it onto the surface of Ralph's workbench, opened up one of the folding chairs that my mother stored in the crawl space, and sat down, I found that I could not reach its keys. Even standing up I could not reach the computer's fold-down keyboard without bending my forearms into contorted penguin flappers. So I dragged over the black steamer trunk my Aunt Gail had bequeathed to me at some point in her wanderings and set the folding chair on top of it. The four rubber caps of the chair's steel legs fit on the trunk's lid with absurd precision, without half an inch to spare at any corner. Then I mounted the chair. I fell off. I repositioned it, and mounted it again more gingerly. I found that if I held very still, typed very chastely, and never, ever, rocked back and forth, I would be fine. Now I just needed to figure out what novel I was going to write.

I went back out to my room and shambled irritably back and forth from the door that led to the hot tub to the door that went upstairs...and my eye lighted on a relic of my stepfather's time at BU: *The Great Gatsby*... I lay on the bed, opened its cracked paper covers...and this time *The Great Gatsby* read me...it did what every necessary piece of fiction does as you pass through that fruitful phase of your writing life: it made me want to do something just like it. I began to detect the germ of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* as I finished Fitzgerald's masterpiece...I put the book back in its place and as I did so I noticed its immediate neighbor...*Goodbye Columbus* by Philip Roth...I had never read *Goodbye Columbus*, and as I got back into bed with it I remarked, in its lyric and conversational style, its evocation of an Eastern summer, its consciously hyperbolic presentation of the myth of Brenda Patimkin and her family...how influenced Roth had clearly been by his own youthful reading of the Fitzgerald novel. That gave me encouragement; it made me feel as if I were preparing to sail to Cathay along a route that had already proven passable and profitable for others....

I put Roth's book back on the shelf and went into Ralph's room and shut the door. I switched on the computer with its crackling little 4MHz Zilog 80A processor. I was cranked on summertime and the memory of summertime, on the friends who had worked so hard to become legends, on the records we listened to and the mistakes we made and the kind and mean things we did to one another. I slid a floppy disk into Drive B....I took a deep breath, saw that I was properly balanced on my perch, and started to write—on a screen so small that you had to toggle two keys to see the end of every line....At some point, I did something foolish: I started rocking in my chair. Just a little bit, but it was too much. I rocked backward, fell off the trunk, hit my head on a steel shelf, and made a lot of noise. There was so much racket that my mother came to the top of the stairs and called out to ask if I was all right, and anyway, what was I doing down there?

I clambered back up from the floor, palpating the tender knot on my skull where the angel of writers, by way of warning welcome or harsh blessing, had just given me a mighty *zetz*. I hit the combination of keys that meant SAVE.

"I'm writing a novel," I told her.

--Michael Chabon, "My Back Pages" from *Map and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands.*

Excerpts from Joseph Campbell's THE POWER OF MYTH

****Mythology is the song. It's the song of the imagination, inspired by the energies of the body. Once a Zen master stood up before his students and was about to deliver a sermon. And just as he was about to open his mouth, a bird sang. And he said, "The sermon has been delivered."

****The individual has to find an aspect of myth that relates to his own life. Myth basically serves four functions. The first is the mystical function--that is the one I've been speaking about, realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before this mystery. Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms. If you lose that, you don't have a mythology. If mystery is manifest through all things, the universe becomes as it were, a holy picture. You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions of your actual world.

The second is a cosmological dimension, the dimension with which science is concerned--showing you what the shape of the universe is, but showing it in such a way that the mystery again comes through. Today we tend to think that scientists have all the answers. But the great ones tell us, "No, we haven't got all the answers. We're telling you how it works--but what is it?" You strike a match, what's fire? You can tell me about oxidation, but that doesn't tell me a thing.

The third function is the sociological one--supporting and validating a certain social order. And here's where the myths vary enormously from place to place. You can a have a whole mythology for polygamy, a whole mythology for monogramy. Either one's okay. It depends on where you are. It is the sociological function of myth that has taken over in our world--and it is out of date....

But there is a fourth function of myth, and this is the one that I think everyone must try today to relate to--and that is the pedagogical function, of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances. Myths can teach you that...We have today to learn to get back in accord with the wisdom of nature and realize again our brotherhood with the animals and the water and the sea.

****I can't think of any [myths] that say that if you're going to live, you won't suffer.

****Anyone writing a creative work knows that you open, you yield yourself, and the book talks to you and builds itself. To a certain extent, you become the carrier of something that is given to you from what have been called the Muses--or, in biblical language, "God." This is no fancy, it is a fact. Since the inspiration comes from the unconscious, and since the unconscious minds of the people of any single small society have much in common, what the shaman or seer brings forth is something that is waiting to be brought forth in everyone. So when one hears the seer's story, one responds, "Aha! That is my story. This is something that I had always wanted to say but wasn't able to say." There has to be a dialogue, an interaction between the seer and the community.

****Myths are so intimately bound to the culture, time, and place that unless the symbols, the metaphors, are kept alive by constant re-creation through the arts, the life just slips away from them.

SOME NOTES ON SONNETS…

- Saramago -

What is a sonnet?

--A poem of fourteen lines
--Written in iambic pentameter (-/ -/ -/ -/ -/) ("/" equals the stressed syllable)
--With a specific rhyme pattern
--Usually compares two contrasting ideas, or develops an idea—with a twist
--Often deals with love, ideals

The Italian sonnet (also known as the Petrarchan sonnet, after the 14th-century Italian poet Francesco Petrarch), consists of two parts: eight lines known as the octet (or octave), followed by six lines (the sestet).

The rhyme scheme for the octet is: abba abba;
whereas the rhyme scheme for the sestet is: cde cde or cd cd cd.

(In other words, all the a lines rhyme, all the b lines rhyme, all the c lines rhyme, etc.)
In the Italian sonnet, the poet begins with one idea or train of thought, sustaining this theme throughout the octet. Then, a "turn" occurs—also known as the *volta*—and the sestet contains a contrasting or contradictory idea, or one that illuminates the octet in an entirely new way.

The English sonnet (also known as the Shakespearean sonnet) consists of three quatrains (four lines) and a couplet (two lines).

The typical rhyme scheme for English sonnet is: abab cdcd efef gg,
although there are variations.
Again, all the a lines rhyme, the b lines rhyme, the c lines rhyme, etc.

The English sonnet often introduces an idea or subject in the first quatrain, develops it further in the second quatrain, complicates it in the third quatrain, and resolves it in the couplet. The resolution, again, usually contrasts with the earlier ideas.

The making of a sonnet, then, requires attention to meter, to the length of the line, the rhyme scheme, as well as attention to the thought developed, and the turn—the change—in thought. A sonnet is a unity of form and content.

An Italian Sonnet:

The World Is Too Much With Us William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,	a
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:	b
Little we see in Nature that is ours;	b
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!	a
The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;	a
The winds that will be howling at all hours,	b
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;	b
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;	a
It moves us not. --Great God! I'd rather be	c
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;	d
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,	c
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;	d
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;	c
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.	d

An English Sonnet:

Sonnet CXXXVIII by William Shakespeare

When my love swears that she is made of truth	a
I do believe her, though I know she lies,	b
That she might think me some untutor'd youth,	a
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.	b
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,	c
Although she knows my days are past the best,	d
Simply I credit her false speaking tongue:	c
On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd.	d
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?	e
And wherefore say not I that I am old?	f
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,	e
And age in love loves not to have years told:	f
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,	g
And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.	g

Wrtng X Writing a Ghazal....

Let's all try to write a ghazal. We'll select a *radif*, and we'll all use the same one for the first attempt.

What is a *ghazal?* (pronounced ghuzzle)

A style of lyric poem that originated in the Middle East in the 7th century, adopted by Arabic, Persian, Indian, Pakistani poets and musicians. The Sufi poet Rumi wrote ghazals.

Each ghazal consists of 5 to 15 couplets.

Each couplet is actually a two-lined poem, known as a *sher.*

Each *sher* must stand on its own as an independent poem.

Each *sher* is linked by a rhyme scheme:

> For the first *sher*, both lines end in a refrain, a word that is repeated in both lines. It is called a *radif.*
>
> In all other couplets, the second line of the couplet ends in the same *radif* as the first *sher*.
>
> Preceding each *radif* is a *kaafiyaa*, a rhyming pattern that the words/phrase before the *radif* must have.
>
> (For example, if the *radif* is "fence," possible *kaafiyaas* for the ends of *shers* could be "a rusted fence," "ad-justed fence," "the busted fence." (Near rhymes are OK.)

Any meter is acceptable, but all couplets must follow the same meter *(beher).*

Themes are usually love, longing, melancholy, sometimes mysticism.

The poet "signs" the last couplet.

Poet Agha Shahid Ali introduced the ghazal, in its classical form, to Americans. Ali compared each ghazal couplet to "a stone from a necklace," which should continue to "shine in that vivid isolation."

Ghazal *by* Agha Shahid Ali

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar --Laurence Hope

Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell tonight
before you agonize him in farewell tonight?

Pale hands that once loved me beside the Shalimar:
Whom else from rapture's road will you expel tonight?

Those "Fabrics of Cashmere--" "to make Me beautiful--"
"Trinket" -- to gem -- "Me to adorn --How--tell"--tonight?

I beg for haven: Prisons, let open your gates--
A refugee from pity seeks a cell tonight.

Lord, cried out the idols, *Don't let us be broken:*
Only we can convert the infidel tonight.

In the heart's veined temple all statues have been smashed.
No priest in saffron's left to toll its knell tonight.

And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee--
God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight.

From: *A Country Without a Post Office* (W.W. Norton, 1997).

Hip-Hop Ghazal

BY PATRICIA SMITH

Gotta love us brown girls, munching on fat, swinging blue hips,
decked out in shells and splashes, Lawdie, bringing them woo hips.

As the jukebox teases, watch my sistas throat the heartbreak,
inhaling bassline, cracking backbone and singing thru hips.

Like something boneless, we glide silent, seeping 'tween floorboards,
wrapping around the hims, and *ooh wee*, clinging like glue hips.

Engines grinding, rotating, smokin', gotta pull back some.
Natural minds are lost at the mere sight of ringing true hips.

Gotta love us girls, just struttin' down Manhattan streets
killing the menfolk with a dose of that stinging view. Hips.

Crying 'bout getting old—Patricia, you need to get up off
what God gave you. Say a prayer and start slinging. Cue hips.

Source: *Poetry* (July/August 2007).

Ghazal of the Better-Unbegun
by Heather McHugh

A book is a suicide postponed.—Cioran

Too volatile, am I? too voluble? too much a word-person?
I blame the soup: I'm a primordially stirred person.

Two pronouns and a vehicle was Icarus with wings.
The apparatus of his selves made an ab-surd person.

The sound I make is sympathy's: sad dogs are tied afar.
But howling I become an ever more un-heard person.

I need a hundred more of you to make a likelihood.
The mirror's not convincing-- that at-best in-ferred person.

As time's revealing gets revolting, I start looking out.
Look in and what you see is one unholy blurred person.

The only cure for birth one doesn't love to contemplate.
Better to be an unsung song, an unoc-curred person.

McHugh, you'll be the death of me –each self and second studied!
Addressing you like this, I'm halfway to the third person.

As the test of good writing is in the effect produced, and the object of all writing is to produce a given effect, so that effect must be first clear to the mind of the writer, and this requires imagination.

The writer conceives of his idea through the power of imagination, and through the power of imagination the idea takes form again in the reader's mind; the vehicle of transmission is the writer's style. The more fully developed the imagination of both writer and reader, and the more adequate the style, the more perfectly transmitted is the idea.

Imagination is behind all the great things that have been said and done in the world. All the great discoveries, all the great reforms, they have all been imagined first. Not a poem has been written, not a sermon preached, not an invention perfected, but has been first conceived.

And yet imagination must take a second place today and give room for the learning of so-called useful things!

From Amy Lowell, *Poetry and Poets: Essays* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930).

XCVII To make a prairie by Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886)

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,—
One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do
If bees are few.

From Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems, Part Two: Nature.*

In the excerpts below, the power of metaphors in human life is explored: They are pervasive, they often structure our way of thinking, our way of operating in the world. With that in mind, it becomes clear that to use metaphors in our creative writing is a way of tapping into the deeper nature of our readers/audience. It's a way of making contact with them and influencing their thoughts and feelings— because the metaphor causes them to recognize something at an unconscious level. pc

From *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. p. 3

To get an idea of how metaphorical expressions in everyday language can give us insight into the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure our everyday activities, let us consider the metaphorical concept TIME IS MONEY as it is reflected in contemporary English:

TIME IS MONEY

You're *wasting* my time.
This gadget will *save* you hours.
I don't have the time to *give* you.
How do you *spend* your time these days?
You need to *budget* your time. pp 7 – 8

New metaphors, like conventional metaphors, can have the power to define reality. They do this through a coherent network of entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide others. p. 157

Tell all the truth but tell it slant — (1263)
BY EMILY DICKINSON

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind —

Emily Dickinson, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant" from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, edited by Ralph W. Franklin. (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1998.)

Poet Josephine Jacobsen:
"The essence of poetry is the unique view-the unguessed relationship, suddenly manifest. Poetry's eye is always aslant, oblique."

Poet Czeslaw Milosz:
"To write a wise poem one must know more than what is expressed in it. Consciousness leaves every means of expression behind. Hence the regret that we will remain sillier in human memory than we were at the moments of our acutest comprehension."

Poet Lucille Clifton:
"What a poet does, ideally, is talk about the history of the inside of people so that history is more than just the appearance of things."

PC—Marianne 11-2 Sat.

"Doorways to the Infinite" *Word - Image - Association - Metaphor*

The winged word. The mercurial word. The word that is both moth and lamp. The word that is itself and more. The associative word light with meanings. The word not netted by meaning. The exact word wide. The word not whore nor cenobite. The word unlied.

—Jeanette Winterson, ART & LIES

A poem records emotions and moods that lie beyond normal language, that can only be patched together and hinted at metaphorically.

—Diane Ackerman (1948 -)

...as psychologist James Hillman teaches, images are doorways to the infinite. There are two unavoidable qualities to any image: the image is more than you, even though you thought of it--it is itself, with an identity that transcends the personal; and it always can lead to another image--it has no end. Whether the image is a flower, or a door, or a man in a black coat, or a word written in lipstick on a mirror--all these images, any image you can have, clearly have a life of their own and, if dwelled on, inevitably lead to other images, beyond your conscious control. Which is to say, as Hillman and Jung do say, image is pure psyche, the psyche expressing itself in its purest form. (Dreams are images.) To do a ritual, to revel in the revelatory, is to enter the image.

—Michael Ventura, "The Revel in Revelation," in LETTERS AT 3 A.M.

"You own everything that happened to you. Tell your stories. If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should've behaved better." —Anne Lamott

In response to the above quote by Anne Lamott, a friend sent me the following poem:

I Go Back to May 1937
by Sharon Olds

I see them standing at the formal gates of their colleges,
I see my father strolling out
under the ochre sandstone arch, the
red tiles glinting like bent
plates of blood behind his head, I
see my mother with a few light books at her hip
standing at the pillar made of tiny bricks,
the wrought-iron gate still open behind her, its
sword-tips aglow in the May air,
they are about to graduate, they are about to get married,
they are kids, they are dumb, all they know is they are
innocent, they would never hurt anybody.
I want to go up to them and say Stop,
don't do it—she's the wrong woman,
he's the wrong man, you are going to do things
you cannot imagine you would ever do,
you are going to do bad things to children,
you are going to suffer in ways you have not heard of,
you are going to want to die. I want to go
up to them there in the late May sunlight and say it,
her hungry pretty face turning to me,
her pitiful beautiful untouched body,
his arrogant handsome face turning to me,
his pitiful beautiful untouched body,
but I don't do it. I want to live. I
take them up like the male and female
paper dolls and bang them together
at the hips, like chips of flint, as if to
strike sparks from them, I say
Do what you are going to do, and I will tell about it.

Sharon Olds, "I Go Back to May 1937" from *Strike Sparks: Selected Poems 1980-2002.* Copyright © 2004 by Sharon Olds. Reprinted with the permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

FORMAT
In formatting your script, the most important point to consider is readability. There are a number of possible formats—and one that is considered the professional standard. I don't require any one in particular; however,

DO NOT use the following:

Max: Did you hear from him yet?
Pat: He'll call. Give him time.

This format is too cramped, becomes difficult for actors, directors, literary managers, and producers to read after a while. Literary managers, in particular, who have to read large numbers of scripts go out of their way to avoid reading plays typed in this format, which is accepted generally only in published scripts.

A standardized format—presented below—has been adopted by many professional playwrights, but there are also variants on the form which are easy to read and which also help convey the atmosphere/tone of the play.

The following format (or a variation) is used by most professional playwrights:

> **Stage directions**--are indented, single-spaced, and placed in parentheses. Double space before character name.
>
> **Character name**--is capitalized and centered. Single space between character name and dialogue.
>
> **Dialogue**--single-spaced and typed on a full line, with reasonable margins. Double space before next character name.
>
> **Line readings**--are discouraged; but if you use them, they should be centered like character name and placed in parentheses.

The typed script, then, using this format style, looks something like this:

```
                                        (Stage directions in
                                        parentheses, like so.)

                                        CHARACTER NAME
Dialogue.  Dialogue.  Dialogue.  Dialogue.  Dialogue.

                                        CHARACTER NAME
Dialogue.  Dialogue.  Dialogue.
```

Note how this looks different from a screenplay in that the dialogue extends out to the left margin rather than being clustered under the character name.

A sample from a script follows:

(Len takes another drink, hands Celia the bottle. She drinks and hands it back.)

LEN
Good ole Bobby. Here's to you, B.C. Wherever you are.

(Len finishes off the liquor.)

This place is a pit.

CELIA
It's old. Everyone's old.

LEN
Look at that. Lawns shaved within an inch of their life. Stunted little bushes, one here, one there, no flow to the branches, just regimented rows of ugly little shrubs.

CELIA
Yep. Cracked driveways. Greasy bricks.

LEN
Everything's the color of rust.

CELIA
Rust and motor oil.

LEN
I'm taking you out of here, Celia.

CELIA
Forget it. I'm not leaving.

LEN
Today. Now. Tonight.

(He grabs her; she throws his hand off her arm. He staggers.)

Damn, I'm so drunk.

**(*If you insist on line readings, they should look like this:*)

CELIA
(coolly determined)
Forget it. I'm not leaving.

So what goes where......? (In a SCREENPLAY)

ACT ONE (pages 1-30).....Set it all in motion.

Kathleen Morris 27 Morris.

First:
Establish tone, setting, visual images.
Touch on theme/issue.
Introduce lead character(s).
Clue the audience in on: What's the main problem that needs to be solved?
Introduce subplot.
By end of act:
Introduce major characters (especially key supporting characters).
Establish that problem is getting worse--choice must be made.
And finally:
Send lead character off on his/her mission.

ACT TWO (pages 30-90) .....Complicate it all.

Pages 30-60 (1st part of act two):
Establish lead character in new situation, i.e., on his/her mission.
(May be period of adjustment.)
Introduce complications.
(New trouble may arise. Old trouble may change.)
Test character's commitment to the mission.
Deepen backstory and personal growth.
Show character gaining new strength, skills, knowledge.
Pit lead character against villain (or problem person).
Advance problems for subplot.
Take lead character to point of no return.

Pages 60-90 (2nd part of act two):
Complicate the complications.
Provoke character to take desperate actions to solve problem.
Push character to a barrier--a setback.
Establish darkest hour, dark night of the soul, all is lost, etc.

ACT THREE (pages 90-end)....Turn it all around.

Pages 90-95 or so:
Bring character to his/her senses.
Recommit character to mission.
Possibly resolve subplot....
Set up climax.

Pages 95-end:
Push character to mission's final crisis.
Stir up events to critical mass>>>>
Big bang.
Establish outcome for lead character.
Tie up any desired loose ends.

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Excerpt from:

PACING IT by Mark Singer March 7, 2011 *The New Yorker*

(On Tom Stoppard and his sense of pacing, tempo, revealing information)

"When we did 'Jumpers,' it ran first at the National Theatre," he [director David Leveaux] said. "During previews, there were a couple of moments when a laugh wasn't landing. And Tom said, 'I'm worried that you think I'm being cheap, a bit of a tart, about laughs.' Actually, I wasn't thinking that at all. But he explained, 'I feel they're important because, apart from anything else, I think of laughter as the sound of comprehension.' "

"Arcadia" exists as a result of Stoppard's having read, twenty or so years ago, several books about physics, mathematics, landscape gardening, and a Peter Quennell biography of Lord Byron. As the dialogue ping-pongs along, the audience courts the peculiar risk of listening too carefully. "If you take a speech of ten lines—and this is true of Shakespeare and true of Tom—if that becomes too slow, there is no way you will comprehend it," Leveaux said. "Too fast and it becomes a blur of words and you retreat defeated from the effort. There's a kind of ideal resonant tempo."

"That fits with what I think about playwriting," Stoppard said. "It's about controlling the flow of information—arriving at the right length and the right speed and in the right order. 'Arcadia' is obviously a play that's got interesting things in it that are perhaps quite hard to grasp. But it's also a detective form, and designed to be a recreation. If the audience is made to do not enough work, they resent it without knowing it. Too much and they get lost. There's a perfect pace to be found. And a perfect place that is different for every line of the play."

For the entire article, go to:
http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2011/03/07/110307ta_talk_singer

Ideas emerge from plays – not the other way around.

Words as tools of imagery in motion. Words as living incantations and not as symbols.

Living, breathing words as they hit the air between the actor and the audience actually possesses the power to change our chemistry.

Language seems to be the only ingredient that retains the potential of making leaps into the unknown.

Language can explode from the tiniest impulse. Words are not thought, they're felt. They cut through space and make perfect sense without having to hesitate for the "meaning".

I begin to get the haunting sense that something in me writes but it's not necessarily me.

The real quest of a writer is to penetrate into another world. A world behind the form.

Myth speaks to everything at once, especially the emotions. By myth I mean a sense of mystery. A character for me is a composite of different mysteries.

Writing is born from a need. A deep burn. If there's no need, there's no writing.

The more you write, the harder it gets, because you're not so easily fooled by yourself anymore.

Writing becomes more and more interesting as you go along, and it starts to open up some of its secrets. One thing I'm sure of, though. I'll never get to the bottom of it.

excerpted from Sam Shepard, "Language, Visualization and the Inner Library," first published in *The Drama Review,* vol. 21, no. 4 (December 1977)

Interview with Tony Kushner, Pulitzer-winning author of ANGELS IN AMERICA:

ON HIS PROCESS.

"[Process] of writing? Oh my God! I don't know. It's mostly sort of avoiding writing as long as I possibly can. And then when the play is really ready to come out, taking dictation. That's what it feels like."

"I've come to realize that the delaying process is an integral part. A lot of it is research and a lot is hard thinking. It usually takes about a year for a play to come together for me."

"There are these ideas. The best ideas I've had, I don't know where they came from, and I don't know what made them, and I don't think it was just force of will and discipline. And that's frightening."

ON REWRITING.

"Become more familiar with yourself. Learn whether you're the sort of writer, like Whitman, who should never have rewritten anything because his first drafts were always the best, or whether you're the sort of writer who writes very, very slowly and needs to sort of grope his way. Most of us are in between. It's just a matter of becoming familiar with yourself."

"Rewriting is tricky - to be smart enough to recognize what it is in the original impulse that makes the work yours and what makes the work good, if it is good."

"It is difficult to be brave and daring in rewriting, while not being foolhardy, or betraying the original impulse. That's the impossible, terrible thing. People kill things with rewrites all the time. They also kill things by not being able to rewrite."

From the Mad Dog Blues blog:
http://maddogblues-jackpersons.blogspot.com/2012/01/tony-kushner-on-playwriting.html

So What Comes First?

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what comes first. Sometimes it's character. Sometimes it's story. Sometimes it's issue. It could also be a sound or an image. It doesn't really matter which is first as long as by the end all of them have been engaged. You can't write a good story without a good character, you don't have a good character until you have a good story. And your play is not good anyway without an issue.

For me the impetus for a new play is usually the issue, something I'm thinking about, or more probably, something I'm having trouble with in my own life. Frequently it's something that pisses me off.

The issue then goes in search of its characters. I have a collection of characters hanging around in the barroom of my mind. To all of them I have said, "I'm gonna use you someday." But the truth is that by the time they're finished and in a play, the characters are amalgams of several people I've known, together with a healthy dose of my own invention. They are not lifted completely from my life, but they are influenced by people I've known.

Story comes next. And that develops slowly. It begins with isolated scenes involving characters grappling with the issue. And it develops from there. Once again, the material of the story is not autobiographical for me. The issue might be, the rest is not. At this stage I like to work with collections of images because they are visceral.

I typically write dozens of scenes in quick succession. I know that most of these scenes will eventually end up in the play, but at the time I'm writing them I do not know where. I feel very free, at this stage, to wander all around, experiment with all sorts of places, character combinations, and styles. It's fun, I'm excited, I feel like a genius.

These scenes are often short, sometimes only a beat (the equivalent of a paragraph in a work of fiction). I'm working on a theory of little pieces, big pieces. It's hard for me to imagine whole structures, especially at the beginning. But it's easy and effortless to imagine little ones.

From: Playwriting: Brief & Brilliant by Julie Jensen

When I have a few dozen pages, maybe twenty or thirty, I try to put some kind of order on them. I know there are big gaps, but I try not to worry about them. I'll fill them later. Sometimes I discover that I've started my play several different ways. That doesn't trouble me. I'll figure out later where to begin. Sometimes I discover I've written the same scene over and over with slight variations, different augmentations. That doesn't trouble me either. I know from the repetition that this is an important episode in the play.

At this scene-sorting stage, the play is teaching me about itself. Another way to put it is that the unconscious is teaching the conscious, or the right brain is teaching the left brain. This is a more difficult stage than the last and not nearly as fun. The trick is to keep an open mind and not get judgmental or, god knows, discouraged. If I remind myself that I'm just trying to learn what's here, I find I am more creative about solving problems, filling gaps, and finding order.

The last stage is when I let in the editor. She is not altogether pleasant. She's kind of an exacting bitch, if you want to know the truth. And for that reason, it's important to keep her out for a good long time. She'll turn the genius into a retard if I let her in too soon. But she is necessary. She is good at cutting things, good at patching holes, good at perceiving structures, and she has a wicked sense of rhythm.

Here's an example of how it works for me. Several years ago, I was going through a bad patch. I was frightened by a lot of things. Job security being the biggest. I couldn't seem to get a hold on this fear, and it was doing bad things to me, such as paralyzing my imagination. I had an issue: fear.

I needed characters. I got myself a little old lady from my hometown in Utah, someone a little judgmental like my grandmother, a bit strange like my piano teacher, very nervous like my mother. She was a frightened lady.

Next, I needed a story. I began to mess around with some things that would frighten this woman. I moved a house full of people in next door. Strange people, deformed people. The kids, all too numerous, were noisy and way too friendly; the mother was quiet, slow, and threatening. The images proliferated: night, water, blood, strange children's chants, silence, breathing, death. I even came up with a cat that had no hair on its tail. A wondrous image, as it turned out, and one that eventually yielded an entire scene.

Look at rooms, look at spaces. Think about what kind of play goes in what kind of space. Think about what a space or room says about character.

Look at nature. Remember nature.

Look at furniture. Look at architecture.

Look at people. At people moving. People working. People sitting, lounging.

Look at your own spaces. Where you live, where you work. Do your spaces reflect your personality, your mood, your work?

Rearrange rooms in your mind. Think about how to make them say something very specific. How could you say, for instance, that the people of this house have just gone off to a funeral? How could you say that these people have small children?

Study every space you're in for its visual elements. And then, even more important, study every space you're in for its emotional elements. How does that space make you feel?

Finally after you've done all this, think about the possibility of setting a play someplace other than a kitchen or a living room.

From: Playwriting: Brief & Brilliant
Julia Jensen

suddenly realized

Remember: Drama requires conflict. Actions serve conflict. If your character makes choices that involve strong intentions and strong actions, and the other characters make choices that involve strong intentions and strong actions, there will be conflict as each character attempts to get his or her own way. This tension--characters in conflict--is what electrifies scripts. In the process of working out the conflict, some will win, some will lose, some will compromise, some will change, some will come to terms, but all will be involved in forward movement, in a relentless drive to an inevitable end.

A sampling of possible actions:

to arouse to annoy to anger to attack to astonish to antagonize to annihilate
to amaze to applaud to aid to awaken to amuse to access

to belittle to berate to bother to battle to betray to baffle to beg to burden to buck

to caress to control to command to calm to correct to curse to chastise to confide to coax to cheat to coddle to crush

to dare to disgust to dominate to distract to divert to delight to destroy

to excite to encourage to evade to enlighten to enrage

to fondle to frighten to frustrate to flatter to force to figure out to forbid

to guide to govern to hound to humiliate to hypnotize to help

to insult to incite to interrogate to impress to invite to intimidate to imitate to insist

to josh to justify to judge to knock down to lie to to lean on to level with

to mystify to manipulate to mock to menace to mother

to nudge to negate to nurture to oppress to offend to oppose to overwhelm

to please to prevent to protect to plead with to punish to pacify to praise to pet

to question to quarrel with to retaliate to ridicule to reject to remind to reassure
to rebuff to rebuke to relish to repel

to shock to soothe to stimulate to seduce to shame to scrutinize to suspect to share to side with to sweettalk to spare to sway to scorn to support

to threaten to tease to terrorize to trick to tantalize to tickle to tolerate to tempt to test
to thrill

to urge to understand to validate to vilify to warn to welcome to wound

to x-ray to yield to to yearn for to zero in on

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Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, *only through transformation*...

...Then what is good? The obsessive interest in human affairs, plus a certain amount of compassion and moral conviction, that first made the experience of living something that must be translated into pigment or music or bodily movement or poetry or prose or anything that's dynamic and expressive--that's what's good for you if you're at all serious in your aims. William Saroyan wrote a great play on this theme, that purity of heart is one success worth having...That time is short and it doesn't return again. It is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, loss, loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition.

Tennessee Williams (in what comes as close to his artistic manifesto as anything, his "Production Notes" for *The Glass Menagerie*)

latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-jez-butterworth-20110611,0,2667594.story

Excerpts from: *Jez Butterworth finally arrives at 'Jerusalem'*

The Tony-nominated playwright stalled while writing the epic, but actor Mark Rylance, also nominated, urged him on.

by Patrick Pacheco, *Los Angeles Times* June 11, 2011

When asked about the mythic and atavistic nature of his work, Butterworth says, "My job is just to say the following: 'We're only here for a brief moment and we're going to really struggle... to change, to move onto other versions of ourselves. What are you going to learn? I'm of no use to you in that. I can only point out that "other thing," the wind that blows under the door, the wind you can't identify, the one that is completely brutal and merciful at the same time.'"

* * *

"Every one is either running away from something or trying to create something, standing on a cliff, daring themselves to jump off into the unknown," says Butterworth.

Butterworth says that he was on a cliff himself with *Jerusalem* at one point. "It was an overstuffed bird which refused to fly," he recalls. And so he put it in a drawer and instead worked on his script for *Fair Game*...

What reignited his interest was a visit from [Mark] Rylance, who recognized in the play a rough masterpiece. "At 51, I'm so tired of intellectual ideas and academia," says the actor. "And so the very bones and muscles of Jez's language struck me as beautifully visceral. And yet he writes with a great sense of story, of suspense and revelation."

Butterworth says that if he had the guts to finish the play, he owes a good deal to the late Harold Pinter who along with the late directors Anthony Minghella and Sydney Pollack formed a triumvirate of mentors. Like Butterworth's grandfather, Pinter also delivered a valedictory to his protégé. "He was telling me to be completely fearless and to be ready to sacrifice everything," he says.

* * *

...he is intent on staying the course Pinter challenged him to. He lives with his wife, Gilly, and his two young daughters in Somerset on a farm where he struggles daily with the question that has haunted him since he began writing.

"I've never had a problem writing dialogue," he says. "I could always create a lot of heat. But how do you create light? "

Rewriting & Revision *Questions to begin the rewrite journey....*

What is your piece about? (Be ready and able to tell someone what your novel, script, or essay is about very quickly—in one or two lines, i.e., the "log line," plus another fun/fascinating descriptive line. And also: Be ready and able to give a five or ten-minute description of your script, i.e., a mini-pitch.)

> WHY? Once you've finished a draft, you're at a point where you need to become clear about what you've written. Much of it came from the unconscious. Now, to focus and refine it, it's important to bring it into the open and define it. Telling your story to someone else forces you do this.

What is the issue of the piece? (Knowing this will help you stay focused, and will also anchor your entertaining story in substance.)

What do you want to say? (Be sure that you have a point of view—and that we understand what it is you're getting at by the end of the piece. Take care that the audience does not leave your piece believing/feeling the opposite of what you intended.)

What overall action/event are you using to say it? (Be sure that you're advancing your story, theme, issue through action, nor argument. I.e., show, rather than tell.)

What is your main character's mission? (Your main character will have a physical mission--that is, a concrete action that must be accomplished, e.g., the character must win a case in court or an innocent man will be imprisoned--and a personal/spiritual mission--that is, a personal battle with his/her demons or problems that must be won, e.g., the character must learn to trust other people.)

What is at stake? (The main character must stand to lose something very important.)

How far does your character go, what does your character sacrifice to do what he/she HAS to do? (How does your character act beyond the ordinary to solve the problem?)

What isn't working? What must change? (Take a look at the sections that are bothering you....)

What works best, characters or story? (Answering this helps you prioritize your rewrite—and helps you understand the kind of piece you have written.)

Is there one act or one section in particular that stands out as a problem area? (Zero in on the problem area; put most of your attention on this.)

On what area should the rewrite be primarily aimed--characters? story? language? structure? (You'll probably need to work on all—but one area might need extra help.)

REMEMBER: It's all a matter of degree, a matter of proportion. Balance.

Some thoughts on rewriting, revising....

The pleasure is the rewriting: The first sentence can't be written until the final sentence is written. This is a koan-like statement, and I don't mean to sound needlessly obscure or mysterious, but it's simply true. The completion of any work automatically necessitates its revisioning. —Joyce Carol Oates

Some poets actually say they don't revise, don't believe in revising. They say their originality suffers. I don't see that at all. The words that come first are anybody's, a froth of phrases, like the first words from a medium's mouth. You have to make them your own. — James Merrill

Blot out, correct, insert, refine
Enlarge, diminish, interline;
Be mindful, when invention fails,
To scratch your head, and bite your nails.
— Jonathan Swift

Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what it is one is saying.
— John Updike

Revision is just as important as any other part of writing and must be done *con amore*.
— Evelyn Waugh

And some thoughts on inspiration....

Excerpt from *The Turn: Dance in Your Blood* Rumi 1207-1273

Some nights stay up till dawn,
as the moon sometimes does for the sun.
Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way
of a well, then lifted out into light.

I am so small I can barely be seen.
How can this great love be inside me?

Look at your eyes. They are small,
but they see enormous things.

Something opens our wings. Something
makes boredom and hurt disappear.
Someone fills the cup in front of us.
We taste only sacredness.

NPR - 3 min Story Contest

USC Rewrite & Revision Workshop P. Cizmar

Questions to answer by the time the rewrite is complete….

Western Edge. Playtonto Salon

What is your script/story/novel about? (Be ready and able to tell someone what your piece is about very quickly—in one or two lines, i.e., the log line, plus another fun/fascinating descriptive line. And also: Be ready and able to give a five or ten-minute description of your project, i.e., a mini-pitch.)

What is the issue of the piece? (Knowing this will help you stay focused, and will also anchor your entertaining story in substance.)

What do you want to say? (Be sure that you have a point of view—and that we understand what it is you're getting at by the end of the piece. Take care that the reader/audience does not get to the end of your piece believing/feeling the opposite of what you intended.)

What overall action/event are you using to say it? (Take care that you're advancing your story, theme, issue, point of view through action, nor argument. I.e., show, rather than tell.)

Train Trips

What is your main character's mission? (Your main character will have a physical mission--that is, a concrete action that must be accomplished, e.g., the character must win a case in court or an innocent man will be imprisoned--and a personal/spiritual mission--that is, a personal battle with his/her demons or problems that must be won, e.g., the character must learn to trust other people.)

What is at stake? (The main character must stand to lose something very important.)

How far does your character go and/or what does your character sacrifice to do what he/she HAS to do? (How does your character start acting beyond the ordinary to solve the problem?)

What isn't working? What must change? (Take a look at the sections that are bothering you….)

What works best, characters or story? (Answering this helps you prioritize your rewrite—and helps you understand the kind of piece you have written.)

Is there one act or one section in particular that stands out as a problem area? (Zero in on the problem area; put most of your attention on this.)

In what sections/scenes do the story and/or structure falter? (Be as specific as possible.)

On what area should the rewrite be primarily aimed--characters? story? language? (You'll probably need to work on all three—but one area might need extra help.)

Some thoughts on rewriting, revising....

The pleasure is the rewriting: The first sentence can't be written until the final sentence is written. This is a koan-like statement, and I don't mean to sound needlessly obscure or mysterious, but it's simply true. The completion of any work automatically necessitates its revisioning. —Joyce Carol Oates

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Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what it is one is saying.
— John Updike

Revision is just as important as any other part of writing and must be done *con amore*.
— Evelyn Waugh

When you write, you lay out a line of words...The line of words is a hammer. You hammer against the walls of your house. You tap the walls, lightly, everywhere. After giving many years' attention to these things, you know what to listen for. Some of the walls are bearing walls; they have to stay or everything will fall down. Other walls can go with impunity; you can hear the difference. Unfortunately, it is often a bearing wall that has to go. It cannot be helped. There is only one solution, which appalls you, but there it is. Knock it out. Duck. —Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

Publishing Information - 2010

Self-Publishing

1. You can get your own copyright at www.copyright.gov. It is less expensive ($35.00) and faster if you use their online system rather than the mail. If you are a poet, just give a bunch of your poems a title and send them all in for the same price.

2. You can get an ISBN at the Bowker U.S. ISBN agency, at http://www.isbn.org. They cost $125.00 for the ISBN and $25.00 for the bar code. You can get them for much less in bulk.

3. Printing. Option 1. You can go the traditional route and have a professional book printer produce your book. Most have staff that will do your cover (extra charge) and layout (extra charge), or you can do them yourself. This is expensive, but the more copies you order, the less expensive it is per copy. Gets more reasonable after 1,000 copies. You can conduct negotiations and business over email, mail, and the phone, so you can use less expensive printers in Ohio, etc., if you wish. San Francisco has some book printers if you want to stay local.

Option 2. You can opt for POD or print on demand. Be very, very careful, as many of these operations are cons or rip-offs. Some will take your rights in the small print of a contract; others deliver shoddy product. Google the name of the company and "complaint" to get an idea of how this company has pleased its customers lately. Also check the Better Business Bureau for their area. You pay (rough approximation) $3-7.00 for a paperback, $10-15 for a hardcover. The advantage is very little up-front money, and no stack of mildewed books in the garage. You just order the books as you sell them. I suggest checking out Amazon's POD and marketing system during your search.

Option 3. You can print it yourself at home on your computer. Covers are not hard to glue on, and you can have them printed separately. We have lots of local artists that might be pleased to do cover art. My husband got a gift from a friend - a book of poetry with each front cover hand painted by the author's brother, an artist. It was very nice.

OK - here is Linda's opinion, for which she cannot be held responsible. I did some research on the blogosphere, and this is just the opinion of an amateur, but it seems that most authors get 5-10% of list price in their contracts from the big publishing houses. The publishing house does all the printing, marketing and sales, shipping, storing, bill collecting and accounting, etc. If you can get published by them, I would advise going for it. My second choice would be Amazon's POD. Yes, you pay all the printing costs. Then, when you list your book with them, they will take 65% of the list as well. If they mark your book down, that comes out of Amazon's share, so you will always get your 35%. You set the list price, but you have to be competitive, so for a paperback, you will make maybe $0.50 to $1.00 per book (very rough estimate). You can see that you have to sell a lot of books to make this worthwhile. However, Amazon does market your book. They have several sales functions, such as their "People who bought Book X also liked Book Y", etc., and they are leveling the playing field for self-publishers and small presses. Amazon is currently operating at a loss in order to gain a dominant market share. When they have it, the deal will probably not be as good. In addition, you can still order a small (or large) bunch of books and sell them yourself. Not a bad deal and very low risk. I would download and print their sales contract and discuss it with an attorney before signing. I read it and thought it was fair, but I'm no legal expert.

The real problem I see with self-publishing is that you have to spend a lot of time selling books. Most authors don't want to spend 20 hours a week doing sales. Most authors do not end up selling all their books, which leads to a financial loss. But if you have a knack for sales, or a spouse who loves sales, or a rabid fan who is a talented salesperson, you have overcome this roadblock.

I hope that this information is helpful as a starting point. I also hope you find ways to do things cheaper and easier, and I wish you success!

Traditional Publishing - Information from 1995

I went to a Writer's Conference in San Diego. This information is from that conference, quite a few years ago (am I really that old now?)

Publishers all have different writers guidelines, which should be viewed as literary scripture. Not following the guidelines is usually manuscript death. To start, you can research publishers in a library copy of *Literary Marketplace* or *Writer's Digest*. Next, you check out the publisher's website, as these things change rapidly. The website is considered the most recent information, and should be followed.

A publisher will tell you exactly what they want, including sometimes font and paper. Usually, they ask for one or more of the following:

- query letter
- proposal
- synopsis
- a few chapters
- the whole manuscript

The two books above will give you tips about how to write these items. I also read a few library books on how to write them. In addition, the publisher's writers guidelines will sometimes include tips about what that publisher likes, as well as their pet peeves. Once you have written these for your book, you have finished half of your marketing chores. Then you just tailor them to each publisher as necessary, and send them off. Be sure to check whether it has to be sent by email or regular mail. Also, some publishers accept simultaneous submissions, but some don't, so remember to check that out for each one. Then you wait for months until you get your rejection letter. Each rejection letter is a successful career move forward, and should be met with celebratory champagne, a comment on the absence of taste directed at the editor who missed your fabulous jewel, and most importantly - the manuscript being popped in an already-addressed envelope and sent to the next publisher on your list. That day. Check them off your book log, slowly sober up, and write something even better. It's a great life, isn't it?

Best wishes - remember me when you are famous - Linda

From: Building a Character from the Inside Out: A Four-Day Character & Story Development Workshop Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Guidelines for Various Character Monologues

From an exploration of characters and their passions, needs, wants, desires, drives, and voice, we can often generate ideas for stories.
What does the character care about? What are this character's big dreams? Petty concerns? How does this character manage to be heard? In what style? Often, just giving your character an opportunity to speak helps to open up the door to creating story.
Thus, we will use various monologues to generate story and to become attuned to the character's voice (what makes this character unique).

Character Passion Monologue.
--Select ONE of the options below for creating this monologue/story tool.
-- Don't worry if your character just talks about manicures and doesn't devote himself/herself to larger issues—that information is useful and will give you hints about the character's background or concerns. If, for example, you're sending a character who cares only about hair and makeup on a dangerous mission....well, this gives you some story problems that will be interesting to solve, e.g., how does the hair and makeup person cope with a threat of danger? How long does it take the hair and makeup character to learn how to survive? How does the h&m person use his/her particular expertise to vanquish a bad guy?

For all options, begin this way: Relax.
Don't plan what you're going to write. Get comfortable. Get quiet. Think of your character. And just start writing. Be open and explore.

Options:
(1) You may simply sit down, start writing, and let the character speak and see what happens.
(2) You may meditate and visualize the character. Then ask the character to complete one of the following phrases. Write until a character voice is clear.

If I could ever....
What I really love is when...

(3) You may imagine that the character has been given fifteen minutes on primetime television. The whole world will be watching. And your character is going to tell the world what's wrong with it. (Hint: Your character may be more bothered by people who don't use turn signals than he/she is about world peace.)

Note: You may ultimately want to explore passions/needs/etc. for each of your major characters, but at the beginning, focus on your lead character only.
Important: After you're done exploring, turn in an edited version of your Character Passion Monologue—no more than one page long in 12-point Courier; in other words, yes, you'll select interesting material from a much larger exploratory exercise.

Character Voice Monologue.

Different people sound different from other people. And then, too, people speak to the different people in their life differently. Do you speak to the head of the company where you're trying to earn a promotion the same way you speak to your best friend whom you've known since third grade?

The purpose of this monologue is to generate a character's voice, i.e., to begin writing speech for the character that is alive, rich with subtext, and that provides the audience with insight into a character,

Thus, we create a voice for our character—diction, speech patterns, slang, favorite expressions, rhythms—and we use it to help the audience understand who this character is. And we use it to help create the mood and tone in our scenes. We investigate whether or not the character is articulate. Hesitant. A motor mouth. Very still and calm. Willing to speak. Distant. We work on unearthing the character's voice until we know it. Until we are ready and able to write dialogue for this character that will be unique to that character's persona.

To explore character voice, begin this way: Relax.
Don't plan what you're going to write. Get comfortable. Get quiet. Visualize your character. Look at your character's facial expression, body language, posture, clothing. Consider your character's age, background, economic status. When you can see your character in detail, let your character say whatever pops into his/her head on one of the following. Be open and explore. Let your character express himself/herself in his/her own particular way. Slang? Formal? See what happens.

Options:

1. Your character is talking to a best friend. Your character is upset that no one seems to understand him/her.
2. Your character is talking to a boss or authority figure (parent?). Your character must make an excuse for being late. (Or making a mistake.)

Note: In the character voice monologue you're looking for HOW your character speaks. What kinds of expressions he/she uses. After exploring the character's voice, turn in the section of it you think sounds most like the character, no more than one page in 12-point Courier.

Life of the Character Monologue

Using any method you choose, write monologues for three characters in your story. Now, study each monologue. Where does it seem to come to life? Where does it seem to show a moment of delight and wonder? Or a moment of anger or fear? Where does it ring most true? Select the section of each monologue that to you shows the beating heart of the character. Turn in these three monologues. (Note: These monologue sections should be brief—no more than a quarter of a page in 12-point Courier.)

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Writing X Creating Complex Characters

NOTE: Writing exercises are for you and you only. Use them as a way to get yourself warmed up, to free your imagination, get past any mental blocks you may have about getting started or about a particular piece that is driving you crazy; use them also to "un-freeze" any fixations you may have about character or story or an idea that has you baffled. These are meant to be written fast, instinctively, impulsively, with not a lot of thought. If they work and you end up with something you really like and want to use, great. If all you get is a good warmup or the merest hint of an idea, equally great. So relax, just flow with it.

The Exercise:

1. Either go someplace where you can observe a person/character, or create a character of your own choosing. Imagine: What does this person have to hide? What does this person not want anyone to know?

2. Observe or create another character. Imagine: What does this person want right now? Who does this person love?

3. Put these two characters together in the same location. Write a story, or a scene from a novel, or a scene from a play about what happens when they come together. Remember: Some characters know each other, some don't; some characters like each other, some don't; some characters can communicate well, some can't. Feel free to go in any direction you choose with this scene/story.

-------Variation A – Write the above story/scene for a sunny day.

--------Variation B – Change the weather; now write the scene. letting the new weather affect it.

UCLAx X431.53 Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Building a Character from the Inside Out: A Four-Day Character & Story Development Workshop

Archetypal Characters from Myth, etc./Points for Discussion

The Cinderella Complex

The Peter Pan Complex

The Cassandra/punished for looking upon the divine
    Seers, oracles, prophets; the madwoman, madman

Divine rescuer/helper
    Boddhisattva/Fairy godmother

Fish out of water
    Silkies, mermaids

Star-crossed lovers
    Romeo & Juliet, Rama & Sita, Tristan & Isolde

The reluctant hero

Hero in the underground
    Persephone, Orpheus

The trickster
    Loki, Kokopeli, the court jester

Hero in exile

The wizard, magician, witch

The wanderer

The messenger

Creating Characters THTR 486 P. Cizmar USC

CHARACTER MUST-HAVE LIST

CHARACTERS...

Always have come from somewhere else.

It's your challenge to determine:

Where have they come from?

What baggage do they bring with them? (into the scene; into the play)

How does it affect the dialogue, action, behavior in the scene?

How does it affect the energy of the scene?

Have an agenda.

It's your challenge to determine:

Who wants what?

Are characters' wants/agendas mutually exclusive?

Will they have to negotiate, wheedle, convince, demand, etc.?

chapt - novel conversion from want to need.

Engage in a fluid power dynamic.

It's your challenge to determine:

Who has the power in the scene (in each beat of the scene)?

Who has the power in the play?

Where does the power shift (in the scene, in the play)?

How does the power shift?

Hint for rewrites: If you're having problems with a scene, reverse the power. What happens in the scene if the person without power suddenly is given the power and vice versa.

Have X factors.

It's your challenge to determine characters':

- Eccentricities
- Flaws
- Secrets
- Blind spots
- Lies
- Points where they are off-balance.

VERBS, VERBS, VERBS USC Creating Characters Paula Cizmar

Remember:
The very bottom line is that drama (whether in a narrative work or in a script) requires conflict. Actions serve conflict. If your characters have strong intentions that require strong actions, there will be conflict as each character attempts to get his or her own way. This tension--characters in conflict who must take action--is what electrifies stories.

In the process of working out the conflict,
some characters will win,
some will lose,
some will compromise,
some will change,
some will come to terms,
but all will be involved in forward movement, in a relentless drive to an inescapable end.

For scenes in which the storytelling is less pictorial, here are some active ways to conceive of your verbal strategies (with a conflict focus).

A quick guide to some useful action verbs:

to arouse to annoy to anger to attack to astonish to antagonize to annihilate to amaze to applaud to aid to awaken to amuse to access

to belittle to berate to bother to battle to betray to baffle
to beg to burden to buck

to caress to control to command to calm to correct to curse to chastise to coax to cheat to coddle to crush

to dare to disgust to dominate to distract to divert to delight to destroy

to excite to encourage to evade to enlighten to enrage

to fondle to frighten to frustrate to flatter to force to figure out to forbid

to guide to govern

to hound to humiliate to hypnotize to help

to insult to incite to interrogate to impress to invite to intimidate to indulge to imitate to insist

to josh to justify to judge

to knock down   to knuckle under

to lie to   to lean on   to level with

to mystify   to manipulate   to mock   to menace   to mother

to nudge   to negate   to nurture

to oppress   to offend   to oppose   to overwhelm

to please   to prevent   to protect   to plead with   to punish   to pacify   to praise   to pet

to question to quarrel with

to retaliate   to ridicule   to reject   to remind   to reassure
to rebuff   to reach out to   to rebuke   to relish   to repel

to shock   to soothe   to stimulate   to seduce   to shame   to scrutinize   to suspect   to share with   to side with   to sweettalk   to spare   to sway   to scorn   to support

to threaten   to tease to terrorize   to trick   to tantalize   to tickle to tempt   to test   to thrill

to urge   to unleash

to validate   to vilify

to warn   to welcome   to wound

to x-ray

to yield to   to yearn for

to zero in on

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