

Creative Writing - Summary by Anthony HJ Lewis

based on book and course by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs

WRITERS

- Writing is making an 'ado about someone or something' and is a form of play testing what we know with writers providing us the existential truth of a time & place - as Spike Milligan said 'everybody has to be somewhere'
- Writers are social historians who record 'what it is like to live in my time' and help us make sense of a world which is random, arbitrary and frightening, to impose a pattern to our lives, a sense of understanding, of order, of sanity
- Our daily lives feel boring and dull as they are familiar to us but provide a rich seam for the writers whose role is to make our familiar mundane lives fresh by providing surprising or unexpected perspectives, insights and transcendental moments
- Writing is always artifice, an artefact made up of a myriad of choices, splits, cuts, wasted words & is NOT a direct translation of life, it is not instantaneous nor effortless, it is a hard, process of iteration, revision, and editing to remove insipid words and over used terminology, to deliver something fresh
- good stories are made not born through three main stages of writing - Gathering, Shaping and Finishing as illustrated in the attached diagram

READERS

- Profound freedom and potential of the readers imagination, we create a dream in their heads and need to engage it, surprise them with jolts within their dream
- this created simulated world must lure your reader in from her world without triggering her 'shit detector', your methodology should be 'hidden' or involve the reader as an accomplice if your artifices are obvious
- readers need to empathise or reject your protagonists, and their internal struggles and conflicts, they need to be coaxed and forced into a reaction
- forget your reader at your peril, address her, captivate, entertain, provoke, bewitch, accompany, astound, swallow them up, gossip, conspire with them, jolt them

Gathering

Life Experience

- Life bombards us with a cacophony & is terribly fast when its happening so our experience is more than can be written so sift and filter to the telling unique detail and write about what you know, to be authentic to your values and experience
- let your mind, eyes, hands and senses wander, connect bizarre associations, edit later, range across emotion, images, smells, tastes, sounds, touch, textures, voices, food, mannerisms etc searching out what it is to be, to exist, to be human, science & technology provides powerful metaphors and dominates today's world across many genres, even crime
- stories and narratives help us understand our life experiences, and to experiment with the nature of existence - these narratives are what make us human, and keep us sane and allow us to explore what it means to be conscious

Practice - 'stretched beyond all consideration'

- Terror of the blank white page can be daunting but good writing depends on practice & discipline so write everyday about anything, to develop instinct & flair, then edit, practice by choosing a subject, set a time limit, and write, always set targets
- Dedicate a place to write with your tools arranged around you, and, keep a register of your material and their status, also keep a notebook for ideas, histories, happenings, phrases, idiosyncrasies, thoughts, revelations, places, via prolific reading and observation to collect words, phrases etc
- Huge variety of Sources - mags, newspapers, facebook, others photo albums, anecdotes, your own and others insights - Henry James noted that books can come from dinners, parties, single anecdote or idea, observed behaviour, events - some evolve others emerge, still others are discovered

Your Voice

- there are infinite choices, no-one writes as you do nor makes your unique connections, your story telling is very similar to your speech, your conversation, your humour, wit, your anecdotes & punchlines!
- Fiction is memory refracted and transformed, writing helps us understand ourselves for ourselves, to make sense of our past & current relationships and is always autobiographical, but avoid self therapy, use 'me replacements'

- Communicate big ideas through the small, via the senses, and 'showing' detail, avoid didactic hell holes of telling, seek that trance-like state where your story finds you, discover the narrative rather than create it ...comes with practice...then more practice

Shaping

Narrative

- Narrative is everywhere, it is life, it is how we make sense of our world, our lives and our relationships with the overarching narrative of your story structuring the events, characters and settings into a complex inter play of experience, memory, and plot
- Narrative combines everything into a complex mosaic of inter-acting characters, events, places, conflicts, motives, dreams, proclivities, dishonesties, variations, insecurities, desires, cruelties, virtues, mindsets, and must have tension & emotion, narratives do not always need a plot!
- Narratives are generic and can be converted into many formats ie novels, scripts with the Narrative Chain comprising a complex mix of Author, Implied Author, Narrator/ Speaker, Level of dramatisation, characters, implied reader (ourselves when reading in our own imagination), and finally but not least the physical living reader
- Points of View (POV) sets the tone and is the window into your virtual world and is always biased - who is writing needs to be kept clear and consistent with changes carefully flagged so you move your reader round your world subtly, there is a wide variety of 'angles' and standpoint or Points of View (POV):-
 - 1st person - diary, memoir, confession, stream of consciousness, everything is 'known' to them, implicated, can be claustrophobic e.g. in crime, does the reader trust them? Narrator must have survived to write the tale if a memoir! Testimonials I are very popular these days, the I narrator is a character too and can be close or remote if describing someone else's story e.g. the Great Gatsby
 - 2nd person - author talks direct to the reader 'dear reader' e.g. 'you will see later' Iain Banks made his reader the serial killer, a private letter is in the 2nd person, as are most instruction manuals, scientific papers, self help and educational books.....
 - 3rd person - is most flexible, narrator is a watcher and can be either close, distant or remote, limited 3rd person is close to only 1 or 2, or a mixture, narration can explain outside your characters and be anywhere in the text e.g. an overarching omnipresent voice like Dickens, so can explain aspects not known to your characters, or be party to the ongoing intrigue and gossip e.g. Austen

- 4th Person - if the narrator has a strong presence setting the tone and having own opinions separate to the plot and the author then they provide another POV, important that the narrator is given an explicit character as well if not the authors!
- the Narrator's voice governs readers experience of the whole text and needs to be strong if you change your POV, but NEVER change the POV within a sentence as this appears clumsy and you will lose the reader, changes must be purposeful and flagged, can provide different POV via dialogue, adverbs, actions, 3rd to 1st person is most common, switching between 2 1st persons is hard to do - consider changing the POV if you are stuck

Characterisation

- People are immensely complicated in depth of being and richness of spirit as all of us have a past, family histories, varied & deceptive physical appearances, opinions, perceptions, conflicts, likes, cultural constraints,
- Create character through observation, mannerisms, setting, pocket/handbags, author should know more about the character than ever appears on the page - their dreams, dreads, desires, hopes, fears, enthusiasms, hates, attitudes, outlook, smells, looks, carriage, speech, intelligence - author must be able to 'wear & walk in their shoes', compile a montage of pictures, maps of their rooms, where they live, work, create a visual collage of their world summarised in your stories 'character scrapbook'
- Develop strong empathy & belief for ALL your characters, breathe life into them forcing a reaction from your readers - their sympathy, attention, opinions and aversion - writers must observe, depict, develop, extend normality towards the heroic & explore their inner vs outer perceptions by developing tension, using conflicts ambiguity, stark contradictions, inconsistencies etc
- Fiction provides many ways to present character than just dialogue and visuals via various formats:—
 - Theatre Dramas - dialogue based, characters must be playable by Actors via interactive dialogue, exits and entrances, key skill of Actors is to impersonate character, the power to be another
 - Films/TV - very visual, there is more freedom to balance conflict & obstruction versus growth & explicit and implicit motivations with action (physical, psychological, external vs internal), emotion (temperament, reactions shots) and personality (purpose, implicit/explicit intentions, history)
 - Printed Stories and Novels - provide infinite possibilities to play with the interaction between both the readers and the authors joint imaginations, see POV below

- Fiction creates a 'virtual world' where characters live and develop through consequence by being tested and challenged by events - as an impersonation of borrowed lives in a virtual representation of the 'real' world - use characters to look at different perspectives and points of view (POV) so that they surprise, defy expectations with their own voices, twists in thinking and behaviour, visualise them with telling detail

Setting 'the Pathetic Fallacy'

- Writer is the stage director and designer, creating a virtual world for the plot and characters to exist within, the telling detail must be continually built upon for cumulative affect, plus the reader needs to be continually reminded & refreshed about the setting
- Landscapes, geography and places can be evocative, profound, are central to story telling e.g. Narnia, geology transcends our short biological lives, cities are 'pysch-scapes' e.g. quarried out rocks, subways are wormholes, avoid 'thinking on purpose' and do not 'put it all in' to evoke a place or landscape , compile a collage of different surroundings or experiences in your daily writing as part of building your own scene scrapbook, like a painter making sketches, except include feelings, thoughts, reactions, behaviours, time, distort and exaggerate!
- Surroundings reveal and betray your characters inner world - the Pathetic Fallacy, providing context for your characters' worlds, a backdrop to their hinterland which reveals their characters with telling detail - rooms teem with things, they are our theatres where we live, which hold our 'smudged' history and time on earth, they reveal our life story
- Vivid scenes start with the detail and build outwards, show the big via cumulative small additional multiple details - anchor the reader in your stories present moment, adopt free associations to make the story flow, use fiery symbols, frozen snapshots in time to describe scenes keeping yourself and others out of them and use your characters and 'me replacements' to describe what they see within in the story, leaving the big picture as implicit or unsaid is very very powerful, and transformative

Plot & Shape

- Plot is a sequence or chronology of 'events' that happen in the narrative, and is mainly for the reader, and is an integral part of the dynamic process of writing - avoid too many twists, but also avoid the obvious... remember dialogue is a form of action in writing

- the Plot is often discovered during writing although correctly ordering all the intertwining events, motives, themes, resolutions etc etc to 'make sense' may take time - if its not working change it - its your story after all!
- Most Plots can be categorised into 5 main 'types':-
 - **Moral Plot** - event, reactions, consequences, lesson learned or challenge overcome, quite often moral emerges although the best end with no closure
 - **Bestseller** - formulaic generic conformist repetition of known pattern where events happen to the characters as puppets
 - **Sieges** - claustrophobic, limited cast, sense of place is usually strong e.g. family sagas, or courtroom dramas - suspense automatically built in as story revealed by evidence given by witnesses in a trial, or westerns when a stranger comes to town!
 - **Journeys or Quests** - mirrors emotional evolution of characters e.g. leaving home, usually desire to get back home with large cast and places/settings, can be rambling and diffuse eg Voyager
 - **Moments in time** - single day stream of consciousness eg Ulysses by Joyce
- Important to use a flow chart and map of events to summarise complex plot sequences showing chronology in real time, and also on your stories timeline, to show casual links, and causality - the how and why events unfold, and the reaction of the players and cast of characters, consistent with your setting and character - all plots have a start middle and end (SME!)-
 - **START** - depends on the type of plot but requires an initiating event, a moment of choice, a scene setter that introduces the characters, provides the catalyst, act of will, which makes all else unfold
 - **MIDDLE** - provides the causal chain of events that requires a series of human choices which build the arc of your story, there needs to be resistance (person or situation) and opposition, create goals to strive for and collisions to create emotional responses and ratchet up the consequences so your characters can develop
 - **END** - requires resolution for the denouement, the reader wants to get to this point to the reveal to be enriched, to get closure and pleasure from getting to the end
- **Ordinary versus the Special 'World'** - the ordinary world is the stated narrative and the observed behaviour in the explicit story as written, whereas the Special World sits within the hidden unwritten narrative of secret motives, concealed psychologies, only hinted at by the text but kept implicit until the end, towards the denouement by movement and evolution of not only the characters and the plot but also the reader, and, the author!

- Be present in your scenes - know where you are going and conform to the 'arc' of your narrative, close your eyes in your scenes - what can you smell, feel, hear where who why and note what is not written and question the intent and impact of this?

Finishing

Stepping Back & Revising - Show don't tell

- Writing matures with time providing distance, allowing you to more objectively assess the impact on the neutral reader -- objectivity is the key skill of most successful writers
- Revise, re-read but also keep pushing ahead writing new material till you can see the whole, construct diagrams, summaries, annotate your text with notes & ideas on twists, insights and subtexts and plots, many unintended, produce checklists!
- You cannot write a novel/script in one session, 90% of writing is actually reading at different levels - phrases, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, sections, novels, lifetimes works, to check for cohesion, errors and inconsistencies, and produce thumbnail sketches of your work, prune the excess, be brutal, cut out explanation, but know when to stop editing, cut the non unique,
- Editing rules - be kind, patient, calm, colourful, versatile, curious, heard, flexible, cautious, meticulous, dependent, consistent, vigorous, verbal, stealthy, subtle, restrained, meticulous, watchful, precise, concise, active, decisive, done, and remember avoid abstraction - he was weak with jealousy, this is telling, show with dialogue, behaviour without stating he was jealous, as Henry James advised 'dramatise, show don't tell, except for brevity or affect'
- Maintain balance between action and meditation, maintain a rhythm, never have a scene setter just get on with it, just jump in and back refer, time jumps are fine, cut cliches, rewrite the familiar into strangeness, and mark up print outs of your ongoing material and keep as physical back ups, store your best deleted phrases in your journal or on line bank for future use!
- The shape or arc of your story should emerge during your editing into a clear structured artificial space which makes sense of the chaotic relations between people, events and places, hinting and charting possible paths to reason and rationality amid the messiness of life of your characters
- And remember the 'last inch' or the final 10% of edits can be the hardest

Workshops & Feedback

- Fiction is about language - read aloud to yourself to pick up the cadence & rhythms of your prose, forces you to 'hear' what you have written

- Books are written in solitude but need others to come alive, always make notes on all feedback at the time to capture the hidden nuggets missed by group discussions
- Literary criticism is necessarily subjective, beware 'anxiety of influence' from your favourite sources or advisors as your writing will generate a variety of reactions from different readers and workshops so learn from this variety & spectrum, others feedback will always surprise you, and remember your work is not you, its a created object! Its not personal...
- Writer groups are everywhere and few writers are full-time, there is luck involved in finding a good group but socialisation of the lonely writer is essential as is reading your text aloud to others and hearing their work in progress, and their practice
- Feedback when well intentioned is a gift, when misguided is very destructive - always value a piece of writing before commenting views, as a writer let go of your object and listen with detachment, look for stimulation from others, its not personal! Its not you....

Completion - Cooking the Book

- Many options - local articles, magazines, self publish, web based blog, editorial services, or take the publisher or agent route
- Editorial Services are the modern more web based method to get honest comprehensive feedback early on from many out of work ex-editors!
- Agents take 10-20% commission especially of film rights, 1% writers make >£100k, difficult to get an agent now
- Publishers receive 30-50 manuscripts everyday. 2% get published, your manuscript needs to help the decision maker, be neat and attend to the detail of presentation, style, layout and provide a 2 page A4 synopsis as part of your covering letter plus a stamped address envelope for their reply!
- House style rules do vary - text & layout, page numbering, dialogue, commas, semicolons, dangling participles, apostrophes, use of me or I, capitalisation, spellings, dashes, hyphens, dates/times,
- Writers handbook lists the rules for presentation of manuscripts across different market, desk top publishing (DTP), editing, style, design, tweaking, proof reading, printing (or not!), publishing (ISBN number require a distribution agency if run is>1000)

Good stories are made not born through three main stages of writing - Gathering, Shaping and Finishing

GATHERING

Life Experience

Life experience is a writer's raw material. It is the stuff of stories. It is the raw material that a writer uses to create a story. It is the raw material that a writer uses to create a story. It is the raw material that a writer uses to create a story.

Practice

Practice is the writer's workshop. It is the place where the writer experiments with language, structure, and style. It is the place where the writer experiments with language, structure, and style. It is the place where the writer experiments with language, structure, and style.

Your Voice

Your voice is the writer's signature. It is the unique sound of the writer's mind. It is the unique sound of the writer's mind. It is the unique sound of the writer's mind. It is the unique sound of the writer's mind.

WRITERS

Writers are social historians who record what it is like to live in their time, and help us to make sense of a world which is random, arbitrary and fragmenting, to impose a pattern to our lives, a sense of understanding, of order, of sanity.

READERS

Produced freedom and control of the readers' imagination, we create a realm in their heads. This created surrealised world must lure your reader from her world without triggering her 'shri detector', your methodology should be hidden or invisible to the reader as an accomplice of your artifices are obvious.

Completion

Many writers, in total isolation, negotiate the final stages of the completion of their work. It is a time when the writer is alone with their work, when the writer is alone with their work, when the writer is alone with their work.

Feedback

Feedback is about language of your prose, but it is also about the writer's relationship with the reader. It is about the writer's relationship with the reader. It is about the writer's relationship with the reader. It is about the writer's relationship with the reader.

SHAPING

Characterisation

Characterisation is the writer's tool for creating a world. It is the tool that the writer uses to create a world. It is the tool that the writer uses to create a world. It is the tool that the writer uses to create a world.

Setting

Setting is the writer's tool for creating a world. It is the tool that the writer uses to create a world. It is the tool that the writer uses to create a world. It is the tool that the writer uses to create a world.

Narrative

Narrative is everyone's story. It is the story that everyone tells. It is the story that everyone tells. It is the story that everyone tells. It is the story that everyone tells.

Plot

Plot is a sequence of events that happens in the narrative. It is the sequence of events that happens in the narrative. It is the sequence of events that happens in the narrative. It is the sequence of events that happens in the narrative.

Revision

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FINISHING