

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

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, genders, 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 our life experiences, and to experiment with the nature of existence - these narratives are what make us human, and keep us sane, what it means to be conscious

Practice

- 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
- 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, social media, others photo albums, anecdotes, your own and others insights - books can come from anywhere - 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 voice, 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 trancelike state where your story finds you, you discover the narrative rather than create it ...comes with practice...then more practice

WRITERS

- Writing is making an 'ado about someone or something', is a form of play testing what we know and writers provide us the existential truth of a time & place - 'everybody has to be somewhere' as Spike Milligan said
- Writers are social historians who record 'what it is like to live in my time', and help us to 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, the writers 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 and is NOT a direct translation of life, it is not instantaneous nor effortless instead it is a hard process of iteration & revision to deliver something fresh

READERS

- Profound freedom and potential of the readers imagination, we create a dream in their heads
- this created simulated world must lure your reader 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 & surprise them with jolts within the 'dream'

SHAPING

Characterisation

- Create character through observation, maverickisms, setting, pocket/handbags, author should know more about the character than ever appears on the page and must be able to 'wear & walk in their shoes'
- 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, Films TV - very visual, Printed Stories and Novels provide infinite possibilities to play with the interaction between both the readers and the authors joint imaginations 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) with their own voices, twists in thinking and behaviour, visualise them with telling detail

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 mosaic of conflicts, motives, dreams, proclivities, dishonesties, variations, insecurities, desires, cruelties, virtues, mindsets etc
- Points of View (POV) sets the tone and is the window into your virtual world who is 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, 2nd, 3rd near and far, 4th person - key decision of any story
- 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

Plot

- Plot is a sequence or chronology of 'events' that happen in the narrative, is mainly for the reader, and is an integral part of the dynamic process of writing and is often discovered during editing till it all 'makes sense' - if its not working change it - its your story after all!
- 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 (SMEI) -
- 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, by 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, and note what is not written and question the intent and impact of this?

FINISHING

Completion

- Many options - local articles, magazines, self publish, web based blog, modern editorial services, agents, or publishers, distribution agencies
- Its competitive - 1% writers make >£100k, publishers receive 30-50 Manuscript needs to help the decision maker, be neat and adhere to established industry house styles

Feedback

- Fiction is about language - read aloud to yourself to pick up the cadence & rhythms of your prose & force yourself to 'hear' what you have written
- Books are written in solitude but need others to come alive, but literary criticism is necessarily subjective, beware 'anxiety of influence' from your favourite sources or advisors
- Your writing will generate a variety of reactions from different readers and workshops so learn from this variety & spectrum
- Writer groups are everywhere - socialisation of the lonely writer is essential as is hearing others, and their practice, look for stimulation from others
- 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, remember your work is not you, its a created object - its not personal, its not you!

Revision

- Writing matures with time providing distance, allowing you to more objectively assess the impact on the neutral reader - this 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
- Produce thumbnail sketches of your work, prune the excess, be brutal, cut out explanation, but know when to stop editing, cut the non unique, avoid abstraction - 'dramatise, show don't tell, except for brevity or affect'
- Maintain balance between action and meditation, maintain a rhythm, and mark up print outs of your ongoing material and keep as physical back ups, store your best deleted phrases in your journal for future use!
- The 'last inch' the final 10% is the hardest