

1. Introduction

One of the fundamental human rights is freedom of speech which originates in the simple need of humans to express themselves verbally, to communicate. What creative writing requires from its authors in addition to this fundamental principle is responsibility, or as Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi put it, responsibility of expression¹. To overcome the barriers and limitations of ordinary communication², one must first learn how to use them conventionally. Only after expected application may come the creation of lexical novelty, whether semantic or formal. One of the splendid possibilities of a writer is to become a rather productive neologist, and this is valid even more so for poets – they seek to create infinite ways to portray (un)reality.

This is a prerequisite for all authors, whether poets or prose writers, in order for them to find a voice. The main contrast is wonderfully put into words by John Gardner in his book *The Art of Fiction*: “Whereas the realist argues the reader into acceptance, the tale writer charms or lulls him into dropping objections; that is, persuades him to suspend disbelief.”³ Authors and critics have been examining this process since the spoken word became self-conscious, this is why the art of Western writing goes back to ancient Greek culture and its rhetoric that originate in one philosopher – Aristotle, with whom starts the history of creative writing.

Definitions of terminology are included in the first chapter, introducing the theoretical half of the thesis. It is followed by an outline of history of the approaches to the creative process since antiquity. The following chapter of this book is dedicated to the reviews of different contemporary (this includes the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century) attitudes of literary personalities towards creativewriting. I established the main criterion of choice.

1 “Dan Perjovschi – Vybrané správy | Selected News,” Nová Synagóga Žilina, accessed May 2nd, 2015, www.novasynagoga.sk/dan-perjovschi-selected-news/.

2 Watkin Tudor Jones, *How to Become a Better Person*, performed by The Constructus Corporation, 2002, African Dope Records, MP3.

3 John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 24.

All of the authors come from English speaking countries. Their attitudes concern mainly inspiration and voice – the primary elements needed for creating fictional narratives as well as poetry. Along with creative writing textbooks, two autobiographical books were used as a source of inspiration for the analysis of the creative process: those of Tom Robbins and Eudora Welty. They provide differing points of view, since Robbins is very humorous, male, and is still alive, whereas Welty's writing is more serious, she is female, and has passed away. They both are major authors of the 20th century but both lived in different contexts of the American South.

The fifth chapter is a summary of what the actual possibilities of teaching creative writing and what impact and/or influence a teacher may induce in a student. It develops further the importance of the individual author's voice.

The last chapter is of a practical nature: it refers to the third but the theory is applied to the experience gathered during the classes of poetry writing I led in the winter semester of 2014. It should serve as a technical manual with as much useful information gathered as possible about the subject of production of one basic prosaic and one poetic form. My own written works that are quoted or referred to in the body of the thesis are included in the addendum.

The thesis is about poetry and prose, considering the fact that advice on writing is similar as well as differing. I decided not to include drama, as already the two genres provide enough material for analysis. Who was the first author I discovered that was not afraid to dive into metafiction? Ray Bradbury, with his *Zen in the Art of Writing*:

“And what, you ask, does writing teach us?

First and foremost, it reminds us that we *are* alive and that is a gift and privilege, not a right. We must earn life once it has been awarded to us. Life asks for rewards back because it has favoured us with animation.

So while our art cannot, as we wish it could, save us from wars,

privation, greed, old age, or death, it can revitalize us amidst it all."⁴

This is the most accurate and intimate yet general description which lies at the core of my own writing process. It is the motivating force that started it all – overcoming the ephemeral impermanence of real life is possible via writing. It is the willingness to conserve memories, whether imaginary or not. This is why the process of creating the narrative is an interesting phenomenon to study and approach from various perspectives.

4 Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*(Santa Barbara: Joshua Odell Editions, 1996), accessed May 2nd, 2015, raybradbury.ru/stuff/zen_in_th_art_of_writing.pdf, xii.

2. Definitions and terminology

Most creative writing manuals, handbooks and textbooks are quite vague – creative writing does not pretend to be a strict science, it needs to count on the human factor. It is in fact a paradox⁵. The only determination must come from the student's inner voice, an ever-present cognitive quality that is willing to manifest itself in fictitious mental worlds propelled via pen on paper. The freedom to (dis)obey the rules proposed by authors/teachers is to be carefully used with compliance to one's own sensibility of expression. In other words, the writer agrees to the responsibility to become their own best critic. How does one recognize that they had mastered this capacity? Only through seeking sources of criticism elsewhere and comparing them to one's own process of critical analysis of other authors' work. Before any confusion should take place, let us define the most repeated expressions of this work. Creative writing can be simply defined as the process of constructing imaginary fictional believable (but not necessarily true) textual units by writing them thanks to inspiration. Writing itself is wonderfully defined in *The Complete Plain Words* by Sir Ernest Gowers: “Writing is an instrument for conveying ideas from one mind to another[.]”⁶ As any instrument, it can be used in an artistic way. Artful processing of words is not only conditioned by the author's ability to write but also his or her ability to read. Francine Prose writes in her essay “What Makes a Short Story?”:

“...the most important way to read—the way that teaches us most about what a great writer does and what *we* should be doing—is to take a story apart (line by line, word by word) the way a mechanic takes apart an automobile engine and to ask ourselves how each word, each phrase, and each sentence contributes to the entirety.”⁷

5 Madison Smartt Bell, *Narrative Design: Working with Imagination, Craft, and Form* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 3.

6 Sir Ernest Gowers, *The Complete Plain Words* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1963), 9.

7 Francine Prose, “What Makes a Short Story?” in *On Writing Short Stories*, ed. Tom Bailey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

This meticulously analytical process has a downside: it may become tiresome and confusing to a point where the reader is no longer sure about where was their point of departure in the reading, relating all detail into an unsystematic mess. Prose does not elaborate much on how she does this analysis. I propose that for each reader, there must be a striking passage or sentence that has the attributes of a trigger and makes the reader recognize that there was a shift in mood, style, action, etc.

Trigger is another term that requires definition since it is one of this work's key words. It might be considered the most adequate word for what is the initiative impulse in the making of a narrative or poetry. Josip Novakovich writes in his manual *Fiction Writer's Workshop*, that “[m]any writers claim that all they need is a good sentence with tension in it, and the story simply unfolds from that.”⁸ One need to take this piece of advice with a grain of salt, since the process of writing does not simply unfold on paper, there is conscious effort involved. However, the one simple trigger sentence contains the necessary minimum of detail of some aspect of a narrative, to an extent that one might even call it a narrative unit. I tried composing narratives comprising just one sentence⁹. The themes are contained in the titles. They provide a clue to what to look for, or what to focus on in the one-sentence narrative, or the rheme. Some are obvious and straightforward, as in “END,” or “UTOPIA,” for some there are prerequisites of cultural knowledge for the reader, as in “FOR THE LOVE OF MILES.” However, what they all have in common is that they should all function as trigger mechanisms for the reader, as the first grains of lines of thought to flourish.

For the reader, the first sentence of a completed narrative must be a trigger in a sense that it is necessary that it contains an element that draws their receptive mind into further reading. The reader-writer relationship is the crucial reference point of the creative process, and a complete and comprehensive reading is the result of a successfully instilled trigger mechanism. Their relationship is provided by the narrative included in the text. It varies from reader to reader, even when the writer and the text remain the same. Robert Hodge

⁸ Josip Novakovich, *Fiction Writer's Workshop* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2008), 13.

⁹ See addendum, p. 70.

writes in his study, *Literature as Discourse*:

“In order for literature to exist as a social practice there must be writers and readers and texts. But slightly less obviously, these three indispensable elements do not normally exist in the same time and place. Writers do not know most of their readers. 'Dead' writers live on in their works in much the same as do the living. Texts themselves survive in memories, transformed by imagination or other process of the mind, recreated or alluded to in other texts. Material readers, writers and texts are indispensable, but not enough to account for everything that makes up literary semiosis. Each of these positions is a site where versions of the semiotic plane intersect, and this play of semiotic meanings greatly complicates the status of the three primary categories.”¹⁰

The categories Hodge speaks of are the three levels of textual comprehension of meaning. The first one is that of the author, the second one is provided by the reader and the third one is the self-contained meaning of the text. Apart from his strange use of the word “category,” Hodge defines in this paragraph the obvious depersonalization of the aforementioned relationship. However, his research was completed in 1990, before the Internet became widespread, even world wide spread. In contemporary society, since the emergence of social media, the writer-reader relationship has become, paradoxically, much more intimate and open at the same time. Direct and immediate criticism is available at any time of day, yet what are the guarantees of its accuracy? A scale of modes has established itself in creative writing, and its borders are between the Dickinsonian isolationism, and today's nameless filterless sharing possibility. On the one hand, this extreme sharing possibility is anonymous, on the other hand, it is not. Tracing authorship is one of the most complex issues of contemporary virtual production.

Inspiration may be identified as any trigger impulse that moves the writer enough to put his or her thoughts on virtual/mental/real paper. It may take the form of outer sensational

¹⁰ Robert Hodge, *Literature as Discourse* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 48.

experience (such as the falling of a leaf for e.e. cummings, or reading a hilarious newspaper article and imagining a fictional background story for it) or an inner emotional reaction (such as the favorite repeated metaphors of novelists – you cannot find a book by Haruki Murakami without a cat walking through the pages, or a simple yet mysterious confusion). They come combined as well. Hence any form of creative writing is always a combined process of two elements, the trigger and the consequence, and even basic Newtonian physics tells us that action cannot exist without reaction. And writing is not just mental work, it is not separated from the physical world, one could even classify it as requiring highly developed manual skills (it hurts when you write for several hours, even on a keyboard – poetry is the escape from this particular creative pain). There are certainly false triggers and the failure of creating good consequence, there are however methods that can help recognizing how to deal with such issues and will be analyzed in further chapters.

Another important aspect of a narrative is style. Style is the specific realization of the author's voice. It is the actuality, whereas the voice is the potentiality, if I may borrow the terminology of Newtonian physics concerning force once again. Robert Hodge notes in his book *Literature as Discourse*, in the chapter entitled “Style as Meaning”:

“At the core of the mystery is a paradox. Instead of an opposition between form/style and content, literary criticism posits an equation: form *is* content. This proposition contains an important semiotic truth, but one that literary criticism is not able to explain, because of its logophilia, its valorizing of words over other semiotic systems.”¹¹

As he points out, this proposition imposes a great difficulty for the usage of the two terms that should in fact help distinguish different aspects of a narrative. The mystery he refers to in the first sentence is the paradox proposed. I believe there is a distinction between these two aspects of a text. Although one cannot exist without the other, form can relate to individual words (as the smallest possible units) and their separate denotations and

¹¹ Hodge, *Literature as Discourse*, 76.

connotations. Style defines how they mingle and interact, and provides ground for the outcome based on the combination of individual forms of words and/or sentences.

Regarding the authors' authority over written fiction, Amy Shuman writes in *Storytelling Rights*: “Authorship is one kind of entitlement. The person called the author is entitled, to a certain extent, his or her compositions.”¹² She does not specify or develop the 'certain extent' that provides the link between author and text. It is directly influenced by the concept of ownership and creative rights. It gets quite messy since writers use a tool available to all literate humans – language. While painters may, for example, claim ownership of, or authority over different kind of paint, technique, and works of art, there is no such material “security” provided for words and language and their usage by writers. “Artists in other media than literature are clear about the nature of their process because they work with material that is fundamentally of the senses.”¹³ There is always something tangible to work with in other media, whereas writing provides no such element, only perhaps the book, a secondary product that does not immediately evoke what is hidden inside, as other artworks do. Contrastively, the book serves as a tool for spreading the information, for providing the narrative. Writers want their words to resonate in their readers' minds. To overcome this paradox, Janet Burroway provides some advice on this abstract realm:

“The trick is that you write in words that evoke the senses—if your language is full of things that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched—you create a world your reader can enter. [... A]s writers we deal in a medium of words, which are abstract symbols, we may find it harder to set logic and argument aside. Writing as an art begins when we surrender ourselves to the world of images.”¹⁴

12 Amy Shuman, *Storytelling Rights: The uses of oral and written texts by urban adolescents* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13.

13 Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing* (Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 17.

14 Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*, 16.

She even proposes a sense of powerlessness in the relation of the author and the word, that even an abstract entity such as a word may become an overwhelming element to work with. A flowing narrative usually hides a tremendous amount of work behind itself.

In sheer curiosity connected to ownership, the smallest unit of narrative to be owned by a person is a word. These words have great storytelling possibilities hidden in their etymology. These are mainly onomastic, i.e. personal proper nouns derived from the name of the person who used it for some product.

Another important constituent of the narrative is plot. Aristotle's language "forced" him to relate it to myth, since the Ancient Greek translation of "plot" is "mythos."¹⁵ This interesting relationship tells us a lot about fiction. It tells us that fiction is basically striving, or has the potential to become myth, a story so powerful that it transcends the realms of authorship and becomes so widespread that it functions and perpetuates itself on its own. In other words, it becomes a narrative that tells a deep idea about some fundamental happening in the world. Surprisingly, DeMarinis reveals that many contemporary stories lack this specific trait:

"A story without a plot is like a house with no hallways or rooms, just nooks and crannies. Which is fine. I like open space; I like nooks and crannies. Most contemporary short stories are thin on plot. They have a lot of space and light in them, and the surprises are in the subtleties of detail, mood, and behavior, not in the architecture."¹⁶

Therefore, a shift in the nature of plot has happened during the literary changes of the 20th century. Due to the vast production of the already existing whole of the literary canon, authors have trouble with creating originality and novelty in their writing. All possible stories are already written, so what is there left to be explored? The simple answer is: Form

15 Hodge, *Literature as Discourse*, 173.

16 Rick DeMarinis, *The Art and Craft of the Short Story*(Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008), 90.

and its different possibilities for exploring points of view.

And what is the element that makes writing creative? The answer is that there is not just one single element. And to each author, their own. Reevaluating the rules of grammar becomes a great gateway for finding new words. To be able to rearrange morphemes or even sememes in new ways that work successfully is a great source of inspiration for poetry as well as prose. Moreover, the willingness to work with several points of view in order to convey a story is another source. Then there are fantastic characters and the author's need to make them interact and watch the results unfold in front of his eyes, as if giving birth to living, breathing organisms (but without the exact same tremendous pain of actual giving of birth). The combination of these and many more methods is what makes creative writing.

3. From Rhetorics to Metafiction – a brief history of creative writing

The history of creative writing runs all the way back to Antiquity, as almost any other field that concerns the evolution of thought does. According to Aristotle (384 – 322 b.C.)¹⁷, rhetorics was an art of persuasion and that is what ultimately writers want to do – persuade their readers that the imagined narrative is believable. The difference between rhetorics and creative writing is that the latter is not necessarily true, because a good writer does not force

¹⁷ “Aristotle,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed May 2nd, 2016, www.iep.utm.edu/aristot/.

his ideas on the reader as permanently valid, it is *fiction* and not *fact*. Rhetorics were taught in Classical Greece. Aristotle distinguished the three features of rhetorics, and these were Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. These three features make up what is a successful oration. The word *logos* defined the word “word” with the word “thought” and vice versa, and created a homonymous relationship between the two. Robert J. Connor notes in his essay on modern application of these three aspects to creative writing:

“Although it was long an unspoken assumption that writing was transcribed speech and that both speech and writing emerged from the same conceptual continuum, recent work indicates important differences between oral and written discourse. As teachers of one form, we must be aware of the limitations of the body of knowledge which has grown up around the other. [...] In terms of what Aristotle called *ethos*, the way in which the rhetor is perceived by the audience, the writer and speaker are faced with very different sets of conditions. Assuming at the outset that each is unknown to the prospective audience, the speaker is surrounded by far richer context for establishing the intelligence, character and good will which make up classical ethical appeal. [...] The writer, on the other hand, is severely limited in the ethical appeals he or she can offer. Unseen by the reader, left to show a personality only through the product, the writer is in a position of fewer but more controllable possibilities.”¹⁸

Although one must agree with the obvious that Connor points out, this anonymity may also be perceived as an advantage, since the influence on the audience is quite intimate (unless we also count public readings of and lectures on said texts). One of the controllable possibilities is the seeming objectivity of the created text. There is no direct influence of the persona of the author, it is more subtle and depends highly on the connection the narrative

18 Robert J. Connor, “The Differences between Speech and Writing: Ethos, Pathos and Logos,” *College Composition and Communication* Vol. 30, No. 3 (1979): 285, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/356398>.

voice is able to make with the reader's mind. It is deeply connected to narrative creation. Josip Novakovich notes on Aristotle:

“[He] relies on hearing a character's voice to carry him through writing. This ability to tune in to a person's voice and to adopt it for writing fiction works for many writers.”¹⁹

A voice of a character then does not correspond to the voice of the author, even when it comes to the narrator's voice. We might state that the separation of these three narrative entities has happened in Aristotle's time. The further development of rhetorics in Antiquity was influenced by Cicero who established its Five Canons that were later picked up and developed by medieval orators, so they will be discussed in more detail further on.

Moving on to the later phases of the development of the creative process, shortly after the decline of the Roman Empire, the first fictional narrative that has seen the light of contemporary days was written. Beowulf is the result of the Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon tradition of bards and their powerful impact on written fiction. It was highly romanticized during the first half of the 19th century, and this enabled academia to focus on what the first written records have to tell us about storytelling. Storytelling was a trade, just like any other in ancient times, for those with oratory talent always seek a listener. However, the need to conserve the content for further generations caused that the oral tradition was put down with ink on paper. Since there were only a privileged few who were taught writing²⁰ and it was long before the invention of the printing press, these few chose what would be conserved. The Bible lends itself as a perfect example of how the literary world was defined by a small group of religious figures who chose what to give to the illiterate masses during medieval times.

19 Novakovich, *Writer's Workshop*, 12.

20 “A Brief History of Creative Writing,” *The Write Practice*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://thewritepractice.com/history-of-writing/>.

A very interesting development took place in Western medieval rhetorics, and that was the revising of Aristotle's and Cicero's Five Canons: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.

“These categories have served both analytical and generative purposes. That is to say, they provide a template for the criticism of discourse (and orations in particular), and they give a pattern for rhetorical education. Rhetorical treatises through the centuries have been set up in light of these five categories, although memory and delivery consistently have received less attention. Rhetoric shares with another longstanding discipline, dialectic, training in invention and arrangement. When these disciplines competed, rhetoric was sometimes reduced to style alone.”²¹

This is a very productive and encompassing categorization, and each of the five canons has a distinct definition that fits well with the others. It also provides insight into what is the oratory creative process, and hence also the creative process itself.

Invention is the first and most obvious stage of creation. It contains a set of topics, and translated from Greek, “[t]opics of invention' literally means 'places to find things.’”²² This is a perfect metaphor for the source of inspiration. Invention thus provides the basic set of relationships between thoughts and ideas, as if composing a general mental storage one can dive into.

Arrangement provides the formal variety of text, as if a predecessor of the contemporary term “form.” However, it is not isolated from content, each specific part has a specific role in propelling of meaning towards the hearer, or receiver. This is especially visible in the relation of the rhetorical tradition to the construction of the novel. Consider the

21 “The Canons of Rhetoric,” *Silva Rhetoricae*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Canons.htm>.

22 “Invention,” *Silva Rhetoricae*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Invention/topics_of_invention/topics.htm.

Cicero's Arrangement in comparison with Nigel Watts' "Eight-Point Arc" of the novel:

Arrangement of Classical Oration	The Eight-Point Arc
1. Introduction	1. Stasis
2. Statement of Facts	2. Trigger
3. Division	3. The Quest
4. Proof	4. Surprise
5. Refutation	5. Critical choice
6. Conclusion ²³	6. Climax
	7. Reversal
	8. Resolution ²⁴

They are closely connected, and one can see the parallels between the two outlines. The first two and the last two stages can be considered as identical. The two stages of Division and Proof may be equated to the four stages of The Quest, Surprise, Critical choice and Climax, as if they have divided into more detailed stages in the longer narrative. The interconnectedness of such manner of processing thought provides clarifying insight into the development of the writing process through time.

Style is the direct approach to the way the individual arranged ideas are discussed, or narrated:

“If invention addresses *what* is to be said, style addresses *how* this will be said. From a rhetorical perspective style is not incidental, superficial, or supplementary: style names how ideas are embodied in language and customized to communicative contexts.”²⁵

23 “Arrangement,” *Silva Rhetoricae*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Arrangement.htm>.

24 Nigel Watts, *Writing a Novel and Getting it Published* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), 36.

25 “Style,” *Silva Rhetoricae*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Style.htm>.

This could be identified with the individual paradigms of expressions used in any narrative text. They are chosen for they have specific connotations and denotations that fit well with each other in narrative units. A whole branch of modern linguistics developed from this category – stylistics. Widdowson explains its purpose in one simple sentence which goes back to the overall definition of rhetoric: “We rationalize our subjective dispositions so as to persuade others to accept them as having more general validity.”²⁶ This statement underlines the basic principles already mentioned previously. The process of stylization is the improvement and exploration of narrative possibilities:

“But ornamentation was not at all superficial in classical and renaissance rhetoric, for to ornament (*ornare* = 'to equip, fit out, or supply') meant to equip one's thoughts with verbal expression appropriate for accomplishing one's intentions.”²⁷

A successful narrative is then a proper ornamentation of the execution of a thought, in order for it to work as a whole when perceived by the third party of the reader or listener.

Memory was at first entirely devoted to learning a prepared text by heart, but it developed into something more. Cicero “calls memory the 'treasury of things invented,' thus linking Memory with the first canon of rhetoric, Invention.”²⁸ It is the storage of things uttered, and therefore, if transposed into the realm of the narrative, also the written text as it is. The composed narrative becomes the memory which is no longer in the need of storage in a person's mind. Therefore, the written canon as a whole is a collective memory of authors worldwide and throughout history.

The last category defined by Aristotle and Cicero is *Delivery*. It is very closely linked to *Style*, since it is its individual realization in an oral performance. All these aspects of

26 Henry Widdowson, *Practical Stylistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

27 “Style,” *Silva Rhetoricae*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Style.htm>.

28 “Memory,” *Silva Rhetoricae*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Memory.htm>.

rhetorics were worked with throughout the Renaissance period. This is also when literary patronage started to flourish along with the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. Literary patronage spans throughout the entire history of creative writing. It started with Roman nobility²⁹ and still continues today with its character ranging from personal donations from wealthy individuals to literary grants that provide support based on contests with specific requirements.

A special place in the history of creative writing is to be made for reading and writing groups. These groups were the predecessors of the creative writing classes of today, since the classes consist of students that have equal say to the texts written among themselves as the teacher. This is not to be confused with the absence of authority – the teacher is the leader of the group, although it is not an imposed role since his or her critical qualities are not to determine the final shape of the stories created by his or her students. But that is to be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter. Creative writing classes as we know them today are heavily inspired by the course that started at the University of Chicago in Iowa³⁰. Almost all creative writing textbooks and manuals refer to this course that started the tradition. Whether with praise or criticism, they cannot deny its influence upon themselves as well as on the new tendencies in perception of literary creation in the second half of the 20th century.

29 Barbara K. Gold, "Review: Roman Literary Patronage," *The Classical Review* Vol. 38, No. 2 (1988): 268-270, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3065586>.

30 D. G. Myers, "The Rise of Creative Writing," *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 54, No.2 (1993): 278, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2709983>.

4. 20th Century Creative Writing

An inside look into creative writing classes reveals a paradox – that it seemingly cannot be taught³¹. Examining this paradox further provides an explanation: talent is necessary in order to learn how to work with craft, and talent cannot be taught. Talent is in fact the author's voice supported by the ability to play with itself, a self-reflective quality that will be examined in further chapters.

Creative writing today is deeply entwined with metafiction. One cannot speak about creative writing without using the language of metafiction. The layers of interpretation and the language that has developed around the field are getting rather large but still need

31 Novakovich, *Writer's Workshop*, 2.

systematizing. What should be considered contemporary? The whole bulk of metafiction written in the past 50 years? Or just the authors that are currently the ones most used? Or the ones making the most timeless statements and advice? The answer to the first question is yes, but the capacities of this work are limited. The answer to the second and third question is yes as well, but my methodology does not dwell on statistics, and quality is not proportionally related to quantity, so this is a perspective unsuited for this thesis. The third question is the one that is the most relevant for this thesis.

4.1 Taming Inspiration – Contemporary Views of the Creative Process

One of the most quoted and most used authors of creative writing textbooks is John Gardner. His work *The Art of Fiction* is now considered a classic among creative writing scholars. It is an update on his controversial essay “On Moral Fiction.”³² This was dismissed by critics for being too didactic – he claimed that all authors should consciously educate their audience through their narratives. The book was discussed to an extent that another critical response appeared in the second season of *Daria* (1998), an MTV cartoon series. A teacher of English and American literature, Mr. O'Neill, gives the class his work “On Moral Fiction” to read:

“Mr. O'Neill - So, what Gardner is telling us is that the writer of fiction has a duty that goes beyond the mere telling of a story. His or her job is to tell a story in such a way as to leave the reader... what, [...]Daria?

Daria - I believe Mr. Gardner feels it's the writer's duty to steer the reader toward more conscientious behavior. No matter how dull that makes the story.”³³

Gardner admits he is didactic. *Daria* swiftly gets critical towards that in a dialogue with her

32 Elizabeth Lane Beardsley, “Review: On Moral Fiction,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 37, No. 2 (1978): 226-228, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/429849>.

33 “Write Where It Hurts,” *Daria Transcripts*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <https://sites.google.com/site/dariatranscripts/213-write-where-it-hurts>.

mother, in the same episode:

“Daria - It's a book. For school. About how fiction should do more than just entertain.

Helen - That sounds interesting.

Daria - Yeah. A writer writing a book about how writers should write books. Must have been a huge seller.”³⁴

However dangerous it might be to impose one's rules of writing on another, when a teacher gets often questioned about their methods, they develop a certain eloquence in the field. Daria, the main character of the series, points out an important truth about the popularity of creative writing manuals and textbooks – they try not to be didactic, yet they have to be. That is the most prevalent paradox about them. However, if the authors manage to be conscious of this paradox throughout the writing of the whole book, the results are of high quality. There are always people who are willing to listen, and these books are not intended for those who are not. The massive number of these books provides a wide variety of advice. This is good because each writer may choose what suits them best, and they need to develop a filter mechanism for advice anyway. On their way to achieve this goal, all that is needed is guidance.

Gardner revisits his didactic tendencies in *The Art of Fiction*, and corrects himself by claiming that “[n]o amount of *intellectual* study can determine for the writer what details he should include.”³⁵ It is an intuitive feat, depending on the formal traits of rhythm and mainly legibility. The sense of detail, and the ability to recognize its qualities are important characteristics for a writer. Gardner also says that “as everywhere in good fiction, it's physical detail that pulls us into the story, makes us believe or forget not to believe or (in the yarn) accept the lie even as we laugh at it.”³⁶ He sets out with the premise that every writer

34 *Ibid*, <https://sites.google.com/site/dariatranscripts/213-write-where-it-hurts>.

35 Gardner, *Art of Fiction*, 37.

36 *Ibid*, 30.

must accept – to play with the truth and modify it is their main job. In addition, Gardner recognizes by this statement that the need of persuasion, mentioned in the previous chapter, is contained in creative writing is historically linked with Aristotle's rhetoric.

Gardner distinguishes between two types of the detail, according to the nature of the text these are included in:

“The realist must authenticate continually, bombarding the reader with proofs; the writer of tales can simplify, persuading us partly by the beauty or interest of his language, using authenticating detail more sparingly, to give vividness to the tale's key moments. [...] Nevertheless the difference is one of degree. Neither the realist nor writer of tales can get by without documentation through specific detail.”³⁷

One could even argue that working meticulously with detail is what makes realist fiction. It is not to be confused with the overworking and overwhelming inclusion of redundant information. It is the recognition of crucial detail that connects the reader's believable relatability with the narrative. No matter how controversial or didactic Gardner started out with in “On Moral Fiction,” he reclaims his scholarly position towards creative writing with advice such as this:

“Having written one superb descriptive passage, the writer should know things about description that he'll never need to think about again. Working element by element through the necessary parts of fiction, he should make the essential techniques second nature, so that he can use them with increasing dexterity and subtlety, until at last, as if effortlessly, he can construct imaginary worlds—huge thoughts made up of concrete details—so rich and complex, and so awesomely simple, that we are astounded, as we're always astounded by great

³⁷ *Ibid*, 25.

art.”³⁸

This sound advice takes its source from the simple rule of writing for learning how to write, that all other creative writing textbooks propose. Gardner, however, takes this advice and words it in such detail, that the student understands the method of this craft, and builds up on the experience with adding a level of logical and reflective rereading of their own work in order to stimulate and observe their own progress of style. Regarding style, there are two ways of perceiving it according to Gardner, again two extremes that we find on a scale:

“To read or write well, we must steer between two extreme views of aesthetic interest: the overemphasis of things immediately pleasurable (exciting plot, vivid characterization, fascinating atmosphere) and exclusive concern with that which is secondarily but at times more lastingly pleasurable, the fusing artistic vision.”³⁹

The “artistic vision” is a rather vague term, and Gardner does not develop it much further. Moreover, he does not even define this phrase which ends the paragraph. In fact, it is a proposition, an invitation to the reader and would-be author to explore and dwell in thought about this wording. Many creative writing manuals contain triggering sentences such as these, inspiring the reader to work the definition out on their own.

In spite of Gardner's love for deep analysis, mystery and natural flow of stylistic input are much more inspiring than meticulous analysis and redundant dwelling on detail. As with any great artwork, the author writes under the pressure of inspiration, as if unable to stop and only discovers orthographic (and other) errors after rereading and editing – as Ray Bradbury claims⁴⁰, for example. One cannot be satisfied with the first draft, chiefly in the field of prose. However, the importance of craft is secondary. Joyce Carol Oates words it very nicely

38 *Ibid*, 35ff.

39 *Ibid*, 39.

40 Bradbury, *Zen in Writing*, 125.

and concisely:

“Without such rushes of feeling, private and untrammelled, there can't be creativity. And yet, inspiration and energy and even genius are rarely enough to make 'art': for prose fiction is also a craft, and craft must be learned, whether by accident or design.”⁴¹

The term “accident” she refers to here is opaque, but if we define it via relation with “design” that she mentions in opposition to it, it is the simple difference between taking in advice consciously or not. A writer sometimes does not choose consciously what inspires them.

Madison Smartt Bell wrote a glorious introduction for his book *Narrative Design*, so much so that I would want to quote the whole of it in this thesis. As this can't be done, I shall marvel at some of the most eloquent snippets that enlighten his view on the creative process.

He compares the essence of composition to two possible conceptual analogies⁴². One of them is basically that the “stuff” of which stories are made is similar to a bag of Legos. It does make sense in the metaphorical way if you imagine words or morphemes, syllables or phonemes (poetry), or the most general unit of meaning proposed by semantics – sememes. This is a highly versatile analogy that turns writing into a virtual playground of form and substance. With an infinite number of pieces and colors, the individual blocks-ideas present an almost palpable basis for creating an immense number of possibilities of expression. How does he deal with this overwhelming number, how does any writer do that? Bell elaborates:

“The writer adds and arranges more and more modular units which may be attractive in themselves for all sorts of different reasons, but which must also

41 Joyce Carol Oates, “Reading as a Writer: The Artist as Craftsman” in *On Writing Short Stories*, ed. Tom Bailey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 12.

42 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 213.

serve the purpose of clarifying the overall design of the text as a whole. [...] A sense of integrity in the work as a whole must be achieved by symmetrical arrangement of the modular parts.”⁴³

This notion of symmetry is important for the writer to realize while creating. They are all the substances that work on the metalevel of word combination – sound, rhythm, logic, meaning, and symbolism. Conscious work with all these is conditioned by inspiration. A writer's work is similar to a juggler's – they must balance out any disharmony of these elements according to the believability of the narrative or poem, and work with tricks that show their skills and strengths.

One of the key sources as to where to look for insight on the creative process are writers' autobiographies. There is a very small number of writers' autobiographies, and autobiographies in general, that do not sink into the narcissist marshes. It is a tremendous feat to write an autobiography, for the author has to boast about the narrative-worthy events that happened in their life without disgusting the reader with snobbery, i.e. they have to have something interesting to say and not feel smug or privileged about it. This is very difficult in today's overwhelming presence of competitive egotistic crap. There is no better English word for it, it is the perfect synonym and equivalent of the Czechoslovak term *brak*. Crap is special. Richard Hugo advises young poets: “At all times keep your crap detector on.”⁴⁴ It is not to be confused with, or included in paraliterature, because there is still high evidence of class, depth and style in marginalized genres such as horror, crime, science-fiction, etc. Janet Burroway defends paraliterature in her introduction to *Imaginative Writing*:

“These fiction genres are often discouraged in creative writing courses because they rely on set narrative elements that have less to do with good writing than with the expectations of particular fans.”⁴⁵

43 *Ibid*, 214.

44 Richard Hugo, *The Triggering Town: lectures and essays on poetry and writing* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company: 2010), 3.

45 Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*,5.

Crap is the exact lack of at least one of the three aforementioned qualities: class, depth and style. In terms of autobiographies, crap goes hand in hand with the lack of, or misguided, or even deficiency of self-reflection, that is self-criticism.

However, one of the most achieved self-reflective writers has all of these qualities – Tom Robbins. The title *Tibetan Peach Pie – A True Account of an Imaginative Life* speaks for itself. As an author of nine novels, he is an accomplished author with a very rare wit who declares in the preface that “[t]his is not an autobiography. God forbid! Autobiography is fueled by ego and I could make a long list of persons whose belly buttons I'd rather be contemplating than my own.”⁴⁶ This claim serves as evidence of the needed self-reflection. He sets out to give his readers the most insight possible on how a writer can come to be, how they can recognize good impulses intuitively as well as with logic, along the remembrance of his own life.

He begins with his early and hilarious childhood. Apart from a strange oral fixation to liquids, which can be poetically interpreted as a sign of willing to intake any form of inspiration⁴⁷, he mentions his close relationship to literature and creating it:

“...I fell totally in love with books as soon as I knew what books were, and I hadn't been talking in complete sentences for many months before I announced to my parents that I intended to be a writer.”⁴⁸

His approach to writing and reaching an audience for his texts is even more tangible in this description of his first publication:

“As mentioned, I started writing fiction at age five. Hardly an

46 Tom Robbins, *Tibetan Peach Pie: A True Account of an Imaginative Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), xv.

47 Robbins, *Tibetan Peach Pie*, 1.

48 *Ibid*,6.

overnight success, however, I didn't get published until I was seven. [...] I had recently composed on notebook paper [...] a rather melodramatic story featuring a reckless boy, a courageous dog, and a dangerous waterfall; so one day during recess I trudged up to the third-floor newspaper office, slapped the story down on the surprised editor's desk, and said, 'Print *this*.'

It appeared in the next issue. And I thought, *Hmm. That was easy. Maybe I could do this for a living.*⁴⁹

It is evident that this is not the start of his official commercial career, however it is much more intimate and plainly relatable to what any writer may feel in the beginning of their narrative journey through life. He gives another soothing piece of advice with this realization, given in the third person singular, even though he writes about himself:

“...and he came to a kind of solace in the knowledge that paradox is the engine that runs the universe. In the novels he was to write as an adult, *transformation* (along with liberation and celebration) was a major theme.”⁵⁰

All his novels speak of strange journeys and associations that the characters undergo, although none of them seem strange since he is able to tell and describe them with such wit and likeness, that they seem as completely normal, even witnessed. Robbins knows he has achieved the believability craved by so many authors, by accepting the paradox of creativity. He also mentions a drastic yet very practical way to judge text and the author's ability to create, while dismissing Daniel Defoe for his craft:

“...in his entire book there is not one sentence so daring or so beautiful or so funny or so wise that I'd give twenty-five dollars to have written it (a screwy way to judge talent, I agree, but there you have it).”⁵¹

49 *Ibid*, 8ff.

50 *Ibid*, 12.

51 *Ibid*, 17ff.

Writers, if not the likes of those who get inspiration in ascetic lifestyle (as is the case of the second autobiography chosen for this thesis – the one of Eudora Welty), crave inspiration that may come from fairly strange places. Robbins' daring advice is that “[he] take[s] a certain refuge in crazy wisdom, even when (maybe *especially* when) it emanates from avatars in pink circus tights.”⁵² His words are the proof that triggers for inspiration may take on any form, provided that they are intense (in any possible personal way).

His love for books is another source of inspiration. It goes hand in hand with the most important and generally valid rule for (beginner) writers: read. It goes to another level when he declares it in the following statement:

“Evidently, I'd suffered an epiphany: the subconscious realization that when it comes to coolness, nothing the human race has ever invented is more cool than a book. I still believe that today. To quote another famous painter, this time Robert Motherwell, 'The best toys are made of paper.'”⁵³

The “coolness” he refers to may be linked with the statement made in the second chapter of this thesis, if we recall the idea that the whole of possible collective human memory is stored in books. These may function as a base, or collective playground for the human mind. Robbins works with this idea, and it is visible in his application of humor in describing his fictitious realities:

“[T]his dichotomy [...] led me to accept and eventually act upon my own life view, my native hardwired inclination to mix, intermingle -- even fuse -- in my novels the tragic with the comic, the ugly with the beautiful, the romantic with the gritty, fantasy with reality, mythos with logos, the sensible with the goofy, the sacred with the profane. Hidebound critics experience some

⁵² *Ibid*, 31.

⁵³ Robbins, *Tibetan Peach Pie*, 35.

difficulty with this approach, finding it challenging to comprehend, for example, how writing can be simultaneously ironic and heartfelt, although to the nimble-minded among us it seems every bit as appropriate as it does surprising.”⁵⁴

He relies on inspiration in the contrastive nature by which he views reality, whether his own or the one he has created. He recounts how his ability to speak at a very early age made him interested in writing:

“What it did do was to instill in me at a very early age the knowledge that words have worth, have power; that language can command rewards. And Freud might argue that that was enough to set my course as a writer.”⁵⁵

His oral fixation with liquids mentioned earlier goes hand in hand with this statement. It is an important, even necessary realization for a writer to make because to use words to create fictional worlds is a powerful feat, a feat of imagination that can inspire many others to do the same.

Further on, he captures the intimate nature of the creative process by the following recollection of a habit he used to do as a child, playing in the garden of his home:

“...there are also completely private acts of literary creation that seek no audience, deny appreciation, are meant never to be read or heard; and these are not so handily explained. Consider, for example, my 'talking stick.' [...] It involved me making up stories and telling them to myself while I beat the ground with a long stick.”⁵⁶

54 *Ibid*, 67.

55 *Ibid*, 71.

56 *Ibid*, 71ff.

This strange shamanic custom does not remain unexplained. He continues with joy at the discovery that his childhood experience might be universal (among writers and tale tellers):

“Imagine my surprise when, some fifty years later, as I was inattentively listening to a program on the Canadian Broadcasting Company [...], I overheard the words 'talking stick.' Startled, I cranked up the sound on the radio. Among certain native tribes in Canada, I soon learned, the tribal storyteller traditionally carried a rod called a 'talking stick' with which he beat out cadence as he recited his yarns. [...] That could explain why, in my adult writing, in my novels and essays, I've always paid special attention to the rhythm of my sentences, realizing instinctively that people read with their ears as well as their eyes. And now I could at last speak openly, even with a modicum of shy pride, about my eccentric past.”⁵⁷

The inner voice of an author is revealed in the process of reading, precisely described in this passage where Robbins claims that “people read with their ears.” Readers' auditory imagination is also included in this statement.

Tom Robbins also deals with the critical reception of his work in his fiction. His intentions are revealed in his novel *Still Life with Woodpecker*, when he introduces the typewriter the novel is written with:

“What are you looking for in a typewriter?’ the salesman asked.

'Something more than words,' I replied. 'Crystals. I want to send my readers armloads of crystals, some of which are the colors of orchids and peonies, some of which pick up radio signals from a secret city that is half Paris and half Coney Island.’”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 73.

⁵⁸ Tom Robbins, *Still Life with Woodpecker* (London: Corgi Books, 1980), 9.

“Crystal” is a great choice for the one word that explains his intentions. One might think of the expression “crystal clear,” or a prism through which the image of reality is distorted to obtain more dimensions or points of view. He further explains his method: “There is [...] a similarity between juggling and composing on a typewriter. The trick is, when you spill something, make it look like part of the act.”⁵⁹ The typewriter is a leitmotif of the whole book, as if an elusive machine behind the secret system of narrative composition. When it becomes exhausted at the end of the book, Robbins finishes in handwriting that is copied in the print version of the manuscript⁶⁰. This is a refreshing touch, a transformation, to use the author's own term, that enables the reader to get into a different focus on the narrative, to make the resulting impact of the story all the more intense for the reader.

Another great autobiography about the writing process and inspiration was written by Eudora Welty. Her book *One Writer's Beginnings* constitutes a dive down her inspiring childhood and early adulthood. She gives gems of insight about her voice, scattered here and there throughout the narrative. The first one is about the most basic tool every writer uses for their craft: “I believe the alphabet is no longer considered an essential piece of equipment for traveling through life. In my day it was the keystone to knowledge.”⁶¹ It is good that she saves herself by stating that she *believes* the alphabet is no longer considered such an important tool – it still is, and many people are not capable of using it in contemporary society. Statistically, circa 50% of the world is illiterate⁶², therefore we cannot speak of the alphabet as a tool that is so common that it is forgotten, lest Welty is speaking of even the literate masses who forget about their privilege that is the usage of written language.

Her mother is another source of inspiration that helped her develop her voice. She was the storytelling element of her childhood:

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 273.

⁶¹ Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 9.

⁶² “Global Rankings,” Unesco Institute for Statistics, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/global-ranking.aspx>.

“What I loved about her stories was that everything happened in *scenes*. I might not catch on to what the root of the trouble was in all that happened, but my ear told me it was dramatic.”⁶³

This statement enabled the young Welty to develop a love for drama that later transformed into her love for writing about human relationships⁶⁴, which is what most of her written works are about.

She also expresses love for words, as Robbins does, but her source is different than that of the precociously eloquent talking stick witticist:

“It took Latin to thrust me into bona fide alliance with words in their true meaning. Learning Latin [...] fed my love for words upon words, words in continuation and modification, and the beautiful, sober, accretion of a sentence. I could see the achieved sentence finally standing there, as real, intact, and built to stay[...].”⁶⁵

This fascination is rooted in the affection for the language in development, in the ability to see what knowledge can be taken from seeing words change through history. She realizes that she may use them and this knowledge about them to achieve successful storytelling, accepting this exceptional gift with gratitude.

She also claims that “[w]riters and travelers are mesmerized alike by knowing of their destinations.”⁶⁶ The destination is not the end of the journey – it is only a revelation of the conclusion that enlightens what happened during the journey. This also does not mean all writers know what are the last lines or thoughts of their narratives. It means that they know they want to finish their story, to complete it, accepting that whatever expectations they

63 Welty, *Beginnings*, 13.

64 *Ibid*, 87.

65 *Ibid*, 28.

66 *Ibid*, 44.

might have about the ending may be proven as false. Another journey analogy one can find in Welty's autobiography is her comparison of the writing process to the climbing of a mountain⁶⁷. To see the world from the mountaintop is comparable to rereading a finished and achieved short story or a poem – the view is clear, it is (before showing it to anyone else) a solitary achievement, and it makes up for the effort put into doing it.

Writers cannot live by their craft alone, in terms of financial sustainability as well as inspiration. The first was possible in the first half of the 20th century in the case of short stories⁶⁸. All writers have other interests and sources of income that enable them to find a reliable base source of inspiration. In the case of Eudora Welty, it was photography (in Tom Robbins' case, it is mycology):

“...most of what I learned for myself came right at the time and directly out of the *taking* of the pictures. The camera was a hand-held auxiliary of wanting-to-know.

It had more than information and accuracy to teach me. I learned in the doing how *ready* I had to be. Life doesn't hold still. A good snapshot stopped a moment from running away. Photography taught me that to be able to capture transience, by being ready to click the shutter at the crucial moment, was the greatest need I had. Making pictures of people in all sorts of situations, I learned that every feeling waits upon its gesture; and I had to be prepared to recognize this moment when I saw it. These were things a story writer needed to know. And I felt the need to hold transient life in *words* – there's so much more of life that only words can convey – strongly enough to last me as long as I lived. The direction my mind took was a writer's direction from the start, not a photographer's, or a recorder's.”⁶⁹

67 *Ibid*, 57.

68 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 7ff.

69 Welty, *Beginnings*, 84ff.

Many creative writing manuals see the abstract relationship of language and mind as an obstacle. Eudora Welty's love of photography helped her to overcome this barrier. She saw past the surface of this obstacle and realized that the variety of word interpretation in language is an advantage, an opportunity to capture the right combination and charm the reader into an enjoyable story.

She also claims “[she] was always [her] own teacher.”⁷⁰ This is a dangerous thought, since only individuals with sound reason and self-reflection can follow this advice. However, the whole narrative of her creative life reflects that this attitude was successfully accomplished, accompanied by the publication of her stories and critical acclaim and prizes they received, which serves as proof of a reasonable creative mind.

She further explains how the visual element came to influence her via another artistic medium – painting:

“Ever since I had begun taking painting lessons, I had made small frames with my fingers, to look out at everything. [...] I do not know even now what it was that I was waiting to see; but in those days I was convinced that I almost saw it at every turn. To watch everything about me I regarded grimly and possessively as a need.”⁷¹

This is an example of a mind consciously open for the intake of inspiration. There was no prescribed or chosen prerequisite for the form or nature of inspiration for Welty. She was simply consciously aware of the reality around her, which enabled her to work in this reality into her fiction. This process is what makes a writer – intense individual perception. How did she proceed with what she found in the reality she lived in? She explains:

“Writing a story or a novel is one way of discovering *sequence* in

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 85.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 88.

experience, of stumbling upon cause and effect in the happenings of a writer's own life. This has been the case with me. Connections slowly emerge. Like distant landmarks you are approaching, cause and effect begin to align themselves, draw closer together. Experiences too indefinite of outline in themselves to be recognized for themselves connect and are identified as a larger shape.”⁷²

This description is again very visual. It transforms the perceived outer world into the alignment of words, a sort of geometrical reworking of reality. One cannot call it a reduction since the two worlds – that of the visual image and that of the word – have a completely different form and provide different resulting stimuli. They are at the beginning and end of the writing process. The transformation unveiled is described in further detail:

“What discoveries I've made in the course of writing stories all begin with the particular, never the general. They are mostly hindsight: arrows that I now find myself have left behind me, which have shown me some right, or wrong, way I have come. What one story may have pointed out to me is of no avail in the writing of another. But 'avail' is not what I want; freedom ahead is what each story promises – beginning anew. And all the while, as further hindsight has told me, certain patterns in my work repeat themselves without my realizing. There would be no way to know this, for during the writing of any single story, there is no other existing. Each writer must find out for himself, I imagine, on what strange basis he lives with his own stories.”⁷³

Welty appeals here on the senses of each would-be writer: to find your voice is essential. Short stories in her mind exist as separate entities, as worlds that do not collide and do not interfere in each other's logic. However, this separation is a sort of oblivion that lifts itself with time and only then one can discover that the stories written have common

⁷² *Ibid*, 90.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 98.

characteristics, or patterns that enable the writer to reflect upon the nature of their voice.

She develops a new level on the idea of inspiration, and how to work with it on the last pages of her inspiring literary autobiography:

“I’m prepared now to use the wonderful word *confluence*, which of itself exists as a reality and a symbol in one. It is the only kind of symbol that for me as a writer has any weight, testifying to the pattern, one of the chief patterns, of human experience.”⁷⁴

This confluence is a sense of binding unity is what both Welty and Robbins have in common. It is a sense of accomplishment that recognizes the writer as trustworthy and able to write, a sense of the different expressive patterns their voices use.

One of the perks of autobiographies is that they are filled with the writers' own specific terminology about the process of writing and editing. These are more natural than the ones given in the handbooks, textbooks and manuals. This is because autobiographies are not written with didactic intentions. The author may want to share his or her examples of experience that may instruct the reader, but these are not the primary vehicle of the narrative. Welty writes:

“Of course the greatest confluence of all is that which makes up the human memory – the individual human memory. My own is the treasure most dearly regarded by me, in my life and in my work as a writer. Here time, also, is subject to confluence. The memory is a living thing – it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives – the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.

As you have seen, I am a writer who came of a sheltered life. A sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 102.

within.”⁷⁵

Eudora Welty writes her autobiography similarly to a handbook, as if like a study of her own creative guidelines accompanied by interesting and inspiring happenings in her life that may give the reader insight on how a creative mind of a writer works.

Most people look down on self-help creative writing manuals so after I finally found one throughout my research, I was curious about the fact whether I would scoff like other academics. The book I found in a second-hand book shop in the center of Glasgow was *Writing a Novel and getting published* by Nigel Watts in 1996, a volume from an edition of Teach Yourself handbooks. Curiously, the advice in it is sound and logical, although not quite well quoted, with formulations such as: “Whoever said that writing can't be taught, only learnt, was onto something.”⁷⁶ The familiar voice he approaches the reader with sets out to give accurate advice approachable by non-scholars. However, his method borders on scientific since he points out important facts about writing and graphic illustrations of narrative arcs⁷⁷ that the scholarly textbooks do not contain.

There are also several linguists that discuss the problematics of creative writing in their work: Sir Ernest Gowers who wrote *The Complete Plain Words* and Professor Henry G. Widdowson who wrote *Practical Stylistics*. The former is mostly concerned with “choice and arrangement of words in such a way as to get an idea as exactly as possible out of one mind into another.”⁷⁸ The latter is a book concerned with the pragmatic reception of poetry and its interpretation. The book uses linguistic terminology and thus connects linguistics with literature. He is interested in the possible educational purposes of poetry. He is careful with his wording of its didactic purposes, yet not quite adequate:

“I do not accept [...] that poets have any special authority to pronounce on

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 104.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Writing a Novel*, 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 41.

⁷⁸ Gowers, *Plain Words*, back cover.

the nature of poetry (sic), any more than linguistic ability gives you any special authority to talk about linguistics.”⁷⁹

He forgets the author's authority over their own poetry. Accomplished creative writing of poetry gives the author authority of opinion about writing poetry since they experienced the process of successfully instilling idea into a piece of text as well as their reader's mind, whereas simple usage of language does not provide such ground. Poetry cannot be equated with simple expression of language especially because it is created to differ from it.

In the matter of poets' autobiographies, we need to trace them in their own poems. Few poets are willing to write an eloquent and lengthy narration of their lives, for the form they use for most of their lives is based on scarcity of expression – if one does not include long epic forms, from the unknown original author of *Beowulf* to Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. These serve the mentioned goal of providing evidence of voice as well.

During his lecture at Palacký University in 1993, Galway Kinnell describes a wonderful episode where he was unable to move from the place he was writing his poem at⁸⁰. This writing trance happened to him in a very inconvenient place – he had to sit on the sidewalk of a busy avenue in New York. This is not the inability to refuse inspiration (and why would any author do that?), it is more of an immediate existential need of expression. He also defined poetry during this particular lecture:

“What is a poem? A poem is our cry of being here. A person tells in his or her own voice without intermediary, without characters, as in a novel or a play, his or her experience of life. And this is told not just by talking. Nor is it told by singing. It's not told by talking because talking is unrhythmic. And it's not told by singing because song cannot communicate complex ideas (sic), but it's told in something like intensified talking that one could call

⁷⁹ Widdowson, *Practical Stylistics*, 87.

⁸⁰ Galway Kinnell, lecture on poetry in Olomouc, 1993.

speech singing. And so the left hemisphere of the brain is expressing the complex ideas and the right hemisphere of the brain is giving us emotional music, and so both hemispheres of the brain are functioning simultaneously. Which is why poetry is a hard thing to write.”⁸¹

This is the most accurate definition of why poets do not need to write autobiographies. (As well as one of the most precise descriptions of how poems come to be written.) I would disagree with his statement that songs cannot convey complex ideas. Precisely by combination of lyrics and complex sounds, the complex meaning may be even more underlined to be noticed and understood by the listener.

Richard Hugo further notes on the attitude of poets towards inspiration: “Poets take some things far more seriously than other people, though [...] they are not the same things others would take seriously or often even notice.”⁸² This explains Kinnell's willing to stop all other activities and write. Poets are often associated with the interest in the redundant, the marginal, since their perception is not that of the majority. If it were, it would become a cliché, and this is known to happen with overused poetic expressions. This is a natural process since the cliché is just a truth or an image that lost its originality.

What about the writer's intention? How does it work during creation? The Australian scholar Robert Hodge approaches the intention of the writing process as well, from a more scholarly point of view:

“If we look closely at the material process of literary production we can see further possibilities for complexity. Writers normally write for some kind of readership, whose presumed interests as real readers affect that writing. At the same time a writer may try to coerce or model these readers into appropriate attitudes and orientations. Writing (and reading) occur within logonomic

81 *Ibid.*

82 Hugo, *Triggering Town*, 18

systems which constrain and determine meanings. Rules of genre and domain restrict the autonomy of writers and readers alike. And writers and readers both draw on other texts which they incorporate into their own construction of meaning. Writers are co-authors of their texts, part of a complex structure of agency which can take many different forms. Individual readers form part of a stratified and open-ended complex, as unpredictable new kinds of reader enter to add new possibilities of meaning.”⁸³

This claim brings us back all the way to Gardner and Bell and their attitudes towards the reader-writer relationship. Even if the writer may take in account that their work will be read and reacted to, they can never expect all the various reactions their text will incite, since the majority of readers implement their personal experience into the understanding of the narrative.

Finally, the most carnal, personal, raw, and direct relationship of an author with their text is defined by Rick DeMarinis in *The Art & Craft of the Short Story*:

“Words became, for me, a bright mantle of power. I discovered that pressing a no. 2 pencil into a sheet of clean white paper was a sensual experience. [...] Creating fictional worlds is a natural refuge for the powerless, since it confers powers.”⁸⁴

The author becomes a provider for the fictional mental world of ideas to take on an independent life of their own, tamed by the specific form chosen by the story's voice. Indeed, many writers claim to enter a specific state of mind while creating, one that is altered to their regular one. Poets go deep to explore this specific “trance,” and it becomes most relevant and insightful in terms of automatic writing. Richard Hugo notes on this process: “It is impossible to write meaningless sequences. In a sense the next things always belongs. In

83 Hodge, *Literature as Discourse*, 48

84 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 3.

the world of imagination, all things belong.”⁸⁵ The phrase “in a sense” is what puts the metaphorical foot in Hugo's statement's mouth. Imagination is intimate and personal and therefore purely conscious decisions choose what it shall contain. However, as analysis of even the most fragmentary stream of consciousness poetry has proven (Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*⁸⁶, for example), meaning lies in form and its special interconnectedness in combinations.

4.2 Recognizing Voice

The fundamental principle that guides a good author is their voice. It is a significant quality that distinguishes the writer's individual abilities, efforts and ways of presenting and expressing his or her ideas. It reaches through all the aspects of the creative process, from initial motivation till the last period of the last editing phase of a sentence or a verse. Curiously, although all writers and teachers of writing are aware of this phenomenon, it is all the more difficult to grasp, define or guide through. Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* suggests a rather exhausting rule connected to voice for the (beginning) writer:

“...insofar as the general rule is persuasive it suggests that one of the chief mistakes a writer can make is to allow or force the reader's mind to be distracted, even momentarily, from the fictional dream.”⁸⁷

This is a ridiculous rule because almost all novels stand on episodic plots that distract the reader from the main and original plot. The underlying assumption that a writer can affect the distraction of the state of mind of the reader is also misleading. What a writer can present to the reader is pure text and cannot affect its interpretation – the only thing the writer can affect is the choice of wording for particular ideas, descriptions and plot twists. Choose words wisely but without the assumption of extensive amount of power over the

85 Hugo, *Triggering Town*, 5.

86 Gertrude Stein, “Tender Buttons” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 313-355.

87 Gardner, *Art of Fiction*, 31ff.

reader's mind, only the reader chooses to be influenced.

Power is definitely a topic that concerns the narrative. The power to persuade, the power to put forth a believable narrative that can even incite a strong mental and emotional reaction is key to a successful story. How is one to achieve this with the help of their own voice, but without sounding imposing? Bell elaborates:

“There are certain signs, in classroom discussion, that a work has in fact succeeded in whatever its intended mission was. When the talk begins to shift from flaws in realizing the story's apparent intention to the idea that the intention itself ought to have been different *kind* of story – that's a signal to the teacher that the story may have been successfully completed. It's a good thing for student's whose work is under discussion to learn to listen for that signal, too.

And when a teacher identifies a piece of finished work in preparing class, it calls for a different kind of classroom presentation. Instead of performing the customary autopsy, the teacher must present the story as literature.”⁸⁸

Recognizing an achieved piece of fiction is a feat, especially when you are not only a critic but someone who sets out to write without the impulse of judgement. Janet Burroway and Rick DeMarinis propose in their manuals what almost all writers do automatically – keep a notebook. DeMarinis underlines its portability⁸⁹ while Burroway scrutinizes its versatility⁹⁰. She even gives specific characteristics of the ideal notebooks:

“[Y]our journal [...] needs to be light enough to carry around easily, sturdy enough to stand up to serious play, large enough to operate as a capacious holdall for your thoughts. Think of it as a handbag, a backpack, a trunk, a

88 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 6.

89 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 16ff.

90 Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*, 6ff.

cupboard, an attic, a warehouse of your mind. [... A]bsolutely anything may prove useful later on.”⁹¹

It is not to be confused with a diary⁹² – a diary is created to map the inner world of a person, this journal's purpose is to map the outer world the writer perceives along with the elements from it that inspire him. Self-indulgent writing of the diary runs the risk of being an immense bore (if one is not prone to the voyeuristic aspect of readership). Moreover, this journal is a very useful tool for recognizing one's own voice. Looking back through old writings in these special notebooks may provide a clue to the nature of the inner voice and individual theme development.

Despite countless efforts, writers, unlike narrators, cannot be omniscient and obtain the self-reflective mirror to their voice on their own. This is why writing schools started. Creative writing classes provide writers with sometimes even an overload of opinions. Bell notes about group criticism done by writers for writers:

“[T]he students were very diligent about annotating each manuscript and writing an overarching documentary at the end – each student producing a separate version of the instructor's work[...]. When the classroom was finished, these fourteen annotated copies would be handed over to the unfortunate author, along with mine. My heart misgave me every time I watched the student (victim) gather them up, and an inner voice whispered, *Please, when you get home, just burn those things.*”⁹³

This is what I experienced in Brad Vice's class on writing short stories – the students all received annotated copies of their own work by their classmates as well as from the teacher. I must side with Bell on this point, I haven't looked at them since the seminar, only now to

91 *Ibid*, 6.

92 *Ibid*, 7.

93 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 6ff.

include commentary on this type of reciprocity in the thesis. It is immensely impractical, it wastes paper, and what you usually get is a massive amount of different subjective, and even personal criteria that do not have anything to do with the quality or the nature of the short story chosen to be analyzed. (Note: The students of this particular workshop were philologists and not students of creative writing, so that may be an additional issue.)

However, it still is valid material that enables trigger mechanisms that permit the author to grow. One must learn to develop a proper filter to recognize valid advice among the heaps of personalized points of view and attitudes. And it also means that there is not much to be changed about the short story in order for it to work. Bell swiftly contrasts with his previous argument about burning the annotated copies:

“But of course they didn't do that. It would be idiotic if they had. After all, this was criticism they'd come to receive – they'd paid for it, worked for it, striven for it. [...] M]any of these students, if not all, would indeed spread out the fifteen different annotated copies and try somehow to incorporate *all* the commentary into a revision of the work.”⁹⁴

Which sounds horrible, but that was what it felt like a proper thing to do, and I refused to do it because even if I wanted to follow the five feedbacks I got for my stories in the workshop I took part in, I couldn't. The following criticism refers to my short short story “S&M” written for the department contest in 2013⁹⁵. One of the readers enjoyed my cryptically short sentences: “The author plays with the images he or she [...] lets the reader see, the author also skillfully manipulates with what the reader cannot see [...]”⁹⁶, while another told me to be less opaque and vague: “...if you added one more sentence to the ending, it would really help the story, now it feels unfinished and it also leaves us with far too many questions[.]”⁹⁷. Although I am aware of the fact that the last remark was meant as a bad trait for a narrative,

94 *Ibid*, 7.

95 See addendum, p. 76.

96 See addendum, p. 77.

97 See addendum, p. 78.

I took it as a compliment. A short story of less than 500 words that sparked “too many questions” is by all means an achieved one. One of the purposes of good writing is to inspire others to doubt and write as well – there would be no literary criticism nor literary history without this premise..

The same reviewer also wrote with hope of inducing change in the story: “...we automatically (sic) finish the question with the word rabbit.”⁹⁸ They were referring to the last unfinished question in the fourth paragraph: “Wh-where is your...?”⁹⁹ I do not trust this reviewer because they 'automatically' assume a group position by using the first person plural (which might be a habit of using the less subjective “we” form from academic essay writing), and forces the author to believe that he or she has more proof of argument over him by quantity of the people that presumably have the same opinion. In addition, the reviewer claims to be disappointed about something a writer cannot influence – the space filled up by the reader's mind that the writer leaves intentionally empty, exactly for the purpose of being filled up by the reader. This is an example of becoming what Burroway calls “a reader of a writerly sort.”¹⁰⁰ She uses this term to define the specific way of reading that writers must do. She (unintentionally) limits this type of reading to literary texts but a writer needs to do more than that. Every piece of writing is the product of a creative process that may be examined, although their purposes and forms are of outstanding variety.

To go back to Bell's original dramatic story of his students, he tries to explain why this overly detailed criticism happens in creative writing classes:

“I let the group have its head and do much as it would. It was all very democratic. Those depressing revisions were the outcome of the individual student trying to please the group mind – trying to please everyone at once – trying to satisfy fifteen different line editors. The inevitable result was to pull

98 See addendum, p.78.

99 See addendum, p. 76.

100 Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*, 3.

the work toward the middle. The middle, of course, is where mediocrity flourishes.”¹⁰¹

A writer knows that he or she is being read, and is all the more careful when his or her readers are writers that are trained to read meticulously, just as he or she is. Bell elaborates on the attitude towards group criticism:

“Learn to listen carefully and to discriminate what's useful to you from what's not. Remember the relevant part and ignore the rest. If even *one* person understands what you intended to be understood, then you can say you have succeeded. Past that, the only issue is just how widely accessible you want your work to be. Don't try to please the group. Don't even try to please me.”¹⁰²

Writer's manuals often have contradictory statements in them, such as this one. This paradox referred to is the sufficient number of one person who should understand the story as it was intended by the author, followed by the statement unveiling the issue of desired readership. Bell tries to raise awareness about the importance of the development of the personal voice that flourishes only when created in solitude:

“The person you have to please is yourself. Your job is to become the best judge of your own work (and try for it not to become a Sisyphus-worthy feat). If you *do* become a professional writer at some point, you'll need that skill more than ever before.”¹⁰³

He then elaborates on about the possibility of shaping the author's attitude towards writing, because that is the only bendable quality, or variable, that may be recognized and altered by outer input and influence. True, craft is also taught via technique, but this model of focus

101 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 7.

102 *Ibid*, 8.

103 *Ibid*, 8.

was proven tiresome and stifling¹⁰⁴.

While autobiographies do not pretend to have general guidelines on how to write, they are the most direct about how achieved fiction can come to a writer's mind, within the context of their social background, personal attitude, politics, and simplest expression of entertainment. They are a complementary source of advice to the different manuals whose intention is to instruct. However, Gardner claims that all good literature “should” instruct. Where would literature be without the reader's personal epiphany, or catharsis (possible via tragedy as well as humor)? And here comes the paradox – preachy literature can instruct too, by the clever reader's mind's disagreement with it.

5. Express Yourself – the Authority of a Point of View and its Negotiability

Creative expression is intimate. Even in cases of collective collaboration or public performance: the authors' the individual input is created separately and then modified to fit the collaboration, the performance happens in front of a public that may react immediately, but the performer still cannot shake the fact that his thought is laid bare in front of others, and that is a form of intimacy as well. That is why it is crucial to find a know-how for ethical criticism and individual approach in giving feedback. There is a large distrust towards creative writing classes, and one of its sources is the question of how much can a teacher

104 *Ibid*, 8.

affect a student's writing. Bell writes:

“It's not that a student's inner process can't be influenced from without. It's that it shouldn't be. Inner process is the student's business and not the teacher's. An ethical teacher may recommend devices to stimulate the process of imagination, but that is a different matter from participating in them. It's probably true that for the individual, the practice of art is not entirely distinct from the practice of working out one's private psychological problems, but as a teacher, you don't want to go fooling around in the area where these two overlap. As a student, you really probably don't want anyone else messing around with the inside of your head.”¹⁰⁵

Of course no teacher nor writer should ever want that. The boundaries might not be visible at first sight, but they are there. The closest one can get to perceiving how much of a fragile of a process this is, is in the case of automatic writing. The selfless abandon of the ego relishes in randomness at first. However, as the process goes on, the writing becomes less randomized with every outer impulse that penetrates the consciousness that is – paradoxically – consciously set aside to let what is beneath out on the page. Gertrude Stein did extensive research on this topic during her studies at Radcliffe¹⁰⁶, so I will not bother with much more diving into this particular topic.

Going back to build on Bell's use of the term “autopsy” – the truly poignant name he gives to the process that happens in class – Janet Burroway contrastively argues that this “autopsy” is actually not a lethal process to the written piece¹⁰⁷. That it is more of a disassembling of a machine (Francine Prose notes the same in her essay¹⁰⁸), that it may even serve as a check if the individual pieces are still in function in new applicable contexts. I

105 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 15.

106 Michael J. Hoffman, “Gertrude Stein in the Psychology Laboratory,” *American Quarterly* 17 (1965): 127, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711342>.

107 Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*, 4.

108 Prose, “What Makes a Short Story?”6.

propose that it all depends on the reader and their ability to accurately tune into the writer's voice while keeping a set of (personal) quality standards required for good fiction. This does not mean trying to forcefind the original intention of the author and consider it as imposingly valid. It is the ability to recognize different point-of-view ambivalences, as well as the lack thereof in places where they might seem expected.

From September 2014 till January 2015, I ran a creative writing workshop of poetry at the department of English and American Studies of Palacký University in Olomouc. The class was a part of the Creature (short for “Creative Literature”) grant that ran from 2013 till 2015. The students all voluntarily signed up for poetry writing, which means that they all knew they had something to say via a small literary space filled by rhythmically curious and meaning-triggering word groupings, or they were willing to learn more about the possibilities of such expression. I was proven right throughout the semester.

Poetry writing is the case where its methodology is either defined by very specific rules in cases of already existing traditional forms, or lack of any specific formal methodology, where it permeates more into relying upon intuition. Feedback is very varied since poetry reception is mostly personal, subjective, and very open to interpretation. Whether or not you are a poet is possible to be discovered the earliest during your teens – even people who resign on writing it start with it during early adolescence. Rimbaud wrote almost all of his (most complex and engaged) poems at ages 15-17¹⁰⁹. Such is the case of the *poeta natus*. Howard Gardner is quoted in the New Yorker saying: “Lyric poetry is a domain where talent is discovered early, burns brightly, and then peters out at an early age.”¹¹⁰ Contrastively, the stance of the *poeta doctus* proposes a rationally learned attitude towards their craft that an author may obtain later in life from experience.

However, after a semester of communication with students, I realized that it's not really

109 Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2010)17-30.

110 Malcolm Gladwell, “Late Bloomers,” *The New Yorker* October 20 (2008), accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/10/20/late-bloomers-2>.

possible to influence the inner process (as Bell warns us) since most of them almost never completely fulfilled the requested homework. They either misunderstood or ignored the assignment completely. They were students of English philology (some of them were double majors and two of them studied Translation and Interpreting), and their prime focus was on other subjects, so this course was only a voluntarily chosen cherry on top of the academic cake.

I began to work with impulses and trigger mechanisms – randomly chosen theme and form (see chapter 5 for “Darwinian sonnet”), a song to write to while listening (A 7 minute long instrumental called “La Femme D'Argent”¹¹¹ by the French electronic duo Air), and an analog photograph (photograph in the anthology *Beauty Spits* for the poem “Bath Talks”¹¹²).

The students were motivated to create readable and presentable pieces of poetry because the output of the course was to be an anthology. Since there were only a seven of us in the whole class and not all of them have been consistent poets until they have signed up for the course, the tiny anthology could only comprise (two) works they have done during the semester.

The resulting anthology was named “Beauty Spits,” and was distributed for free in cafés, libraries, and on university grounds. Since we had no graphic designer, editor or publisher, I did all of this extra work with Pavel Gončarov. The graphic design was done by means of paper cutouts. Grammatical revision was supplied by Pavel and all the copies were printed in the English department library – the Center for Comparative Cultural Studies. The original title of the anthology was thought up by Barbora Hrabalová. This name was analogical to the content. It is supposed to represent that the poems inside are short, sweet, and that they comprise the willing to be read with a little dose of daring. It also has a double meaning, since it can be understood as both a noun with a verb, or adjective with a noun.

111 Jean-Benoît Dunckel and Nicolas Godin, *La Femme d'Argent*, performed by Air, 1998 Virgin Records, MP3.

112 See addendum, p. 84.

Both of these meanings are valid in the means of understanding the anthology. The subtitle “An Anthology of Poetry by Seven Creatures” was chosen to represent the grant that helped this work come to existence, as well as the number and identity diversity of the poetic authors. The authors are in alphabetical order, each represented by 3 sentences about themselves, and two poetic works of their own choice that they created during the semester. The authors are depicted by photographs of nothing more than their lips and chins, a visual commentary on today's overwhelming presence of self-presentation. This semi-anonymous representation is also connected to the title – the mouth is the key to the source to where the “Beauty Spits” come from.

The individual assignments we included in the anthology were those I requested from them: Darwinian sonnet was the first assignment based on random choice of form and quality from *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*¹¹³. I opened the book on a random page to seek a form – I opened it on the sonnet. To find the theme of the poem, I opened it again and the adjective my finger found on the page was “Darwinian.” What were the specific criteria of judgment towards whether the sonnet was successful? Richard Hugo comes with a helpful answer: “I believe that when the poem is coming on with imaginative honesty, there is some correspondence of the form to psychic rhythms in the poet.”¹¹⁴ In other words, the critic inside knows intuitively as well as rationally that the given work of art has stirred their inside sensibilities successfully.

The second in class assignment successful enough to make it into the anthology was to write a poem for a photograph the students randomly picked from a set I gave them. Visual imagery is crucial to poetry, and photographs may be considered as poems – especially artistic ones that depict unusual imagery. They have small dimensions that are limited by format, like a room for one image. This is analogical to the word “stanza,” since in Italian, it means “room.”¹¹⁵ Photography may thus be considered the perfect trigger.

113 Mark Strand and Evan Boland, *The making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Form* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 58.

114 Hugo, *Triggering Town*, 31.

115 Strand and Boland, *Anthology of Poetic Forms*, 137.

The third assignment that turned into a successful poem was a homework assignment to write inspired by the song *La Femme d'Argent* by Air. I chose an auditory trigger mechanism because it is another realization of sensual inspiration. In addition, writers and manuals mainly mention and analyse visual triggers, either ones in the real world or the ones contained in already written poems, so an auditory inspiration provides a welcome twist in the intake of stimuli.

It helped that I was a student as well as a teacher. I also brought my own work (either my own poems or poem written according to instructions of the assigned homework) to class so they could comment on them, as well as to show them that I am not teaching them anything I cannot do myself. I accepted when they have not done their assignments because the exercise did not fit their voice (and all of them found it pretty fast – during the first few weeks.). In this sense, one could not speak of lack of material, effort or enthusiasm.

The individual classes were lead with the help of my colleague Pavel Gončarov, and took place in the café “Druhý Domov,” or “Second Home.” The location provided a truly homely atmosphere that helped the students develop the notion that constructive criticism of each other's work is a welcome process and activity during the classes. In the words of Madison Smartt Bell: “Critical analysis is a perfectly safe and acceptable group activity. Creative process, on the other hand, is by nature private and solitary.”¹¹⁶ However, I have to slightly disagree on this one with Bell in the case of poetry slam, where public improvisations of creating poems are quite common to appear. Then again, Bell is speaking about short stories (applicable to intimate poetic creation as well):

“The writer must maintain psychological privacy in order to remain capable of imagining the work. The strange paradox of all imaginative writing is that it is an isolated and secretive project that one undertakes in order to communicate (in most cases, for the desire of your private writer for public

116 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 11.

recognition is usually quite insatiable) with the greatest possible number of other people.”¹¹⁷

This paradox is the largest obstacle a writer must overcome. They must shape their writing to comply with public legibility and understanding, while remaining true to what their voice is. Most of my students were never published before and never had immediate contact with oral criticism of their work. Some of them needed only slight insight into bettering their grammar, some of them needed to shape their poems due to problems with rhythm. In addition, each student had the same right to argument and share their point of view on the individual poems of others. However, if the author requested by argumentation that this specific form others have had difficulties understanding was intentional, that they wrote it in order to trigger such a debate, modification of the original text was out of the question. Finding the best possible form for their poetic thought was the goal, and it was reached without any major clashes of opinion.

The location of our classes provided much understanding to the creative trance already mentioned several times in this thesis. The mythology around the creative process of individual authors is extensive, it is mostly tangible in the stories about the specific positions writers write/wrote in. Most of the time one imagines an ever-concentrated person sitting behind a desk and furiously typing/writing. However, there are certain renown writers who embrace(d) their creative process in a peculiar way and mostly designe(d) their narrative in specially conditioned situations, brought up to a point of ritualization. Some of the greatest ones were mentioned in an article from *AnOther Magazine*:

“Dame Edith Sitwell chose to climb into an open coffin and lie down before she began writing while Truman Capote would not begin or end a piece of writing on a Friday [,] Agatha Christie created her plots in a large Victorian bathtub whilst munching on apples. Before renovating her house her architect was told, 'I want a big bath, and I need a ledge because I like to

117 *Ibid*, 11.

eat apples.' [...] Gertrude Stein liked to write in the driver's seat of 'Lady Godiva' her Model T Ford while her partner Alice B. Toklas ran errands. Celia Blue Jonson notes that Stein was 'particularly inspired by the traffic on busy Parisian streets. Automobiles stopped and started with a rhythm that thrummed right into her poetry and prose.' Vladimir Nabokov is also said to have preferred reading and writing in the privacy of a parked car, always writing on index-cards, a portable strategy that allowed him to compose on the move while his wife drove him around on his adored butterfly expeditions. [...] Truman Capote preferred to lie down while he wrote, 'I am a completely horizontal author. I can't think unless I'm lying down, either in bed or stretched on a couch and with a cigarette and coffee handy.' As James Joyce's eyesight deteriorated he too began to write in bed. Lying on his stomach at night in a bright white coat, Joyce wrote with large blue crayons."¹¹⁸

All of the above have one in common – they enable the author to focus their body on something tangible in the real world while their mind draws focus on what is put on the page. It is a sort of safety check for the creative trance they get into. This is only possible if the author writes with ink/pencil on paper, because the computer is definitely not a medium that would allow the body, or the hands to focus on one particular idea or object. There is also another downside to writing on an electronic device. Artificial light deletes memory¹¹⁹.

The force of belief in the voice is another element that drives the writer further on with the narrative:

“Ultimately, you have to believe. If it is not real for you, you cannot talk

118 Holly Isard, “Where Writers Write,” *AnOther Magazine* July 29 (2015), accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.anothermag.com/design-living/7636/where-writers-write>.

119 Hugo J. Spiers and Daniel Bendor, “Enhance, delete, incept: Manipulating hippocampus-dependent memories,” *PMC* June (2014), accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4058530/>.

about it persuasively. Because the writing of fiction is all about producing an illusion, it's all-important that *you* believe in the illusion absolutely. You will never fool anyone else if you can't fool yourself. All the rest is craftsmanship.”¹²⁰

However, this piece of advice is double sided – you have to believe and at the same time doubt what you have written. The core of the process is that you start doubting, find the source of the inadequacy, remove it, and with that remove all possible doubt. This does not mean that you remove mystery. Mystery is intentional obscurity included in the narrative, whereas doubt is obscurity in the formulation of the author's voice.

The intimacy of the creative process is what usually discourages students who shy away from public presentation – Emily Dickinson certainly would not be a prize student in a creative writing critical workshop, she would probably not even join one. Alas we are not in the 19th century anymore, and fortunately what is essential to one writer (being an introvert) is redundant to another (being an extrovert), so there is no exact formula with which to work. If there was one, all the novels, poems and stories in the world would sound the same, or have a same specific non-textual quality that would interconnect them. The only formulas that a writer can work with are the morphological and syntactic combination possibilities of the language they are using. As Audre Lorde notes on composition: “Pronouns, nouns, and verbs citizens of different countries, who really got together to make a new world.”¹²¹ When one masters the composition of a sentence, it is far easier to play with and create those blossoming, juicy, poignant expressions that make up a good narrative (that resembles an image from the real world).

Hence a smaller number of students is always preferred in a workshop. They connect better, get to know each other's voice specificities, and learn how to help each other out in

120 Bell, *Narrative Design*, 16.

121 John Wylie Hall, *Conversations with Audre Lorde* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 37.

finding the best means of expression. However, this works in the field of poetry. Writing prose is a different process, although the two share some common ground. Poetry is immediate, it includes the possibility of nonsense and interpretative plurality. Prose is set on a different basis of meaning, and requires more logical connections, and less freedom of interpretation. Apart from postmodern disunited narratives, logic is an authority to be questioned in the process of creation:

“Here's why so many writers prefer to break off in the middle of some passage, fearing that if they stop work at the end of something it will be too difficult to begin again—as when, upon your next stretching out to sleep, some tendril of your last night's dream may once again appear to you...”¹²²

I've experienced this while writing fiction, it demonstrates the fragility of writing, the yearning to come up with a story that would mystify, yet clarify at the same time. The different possibilities of how to overcome this paradox are contained in the next chapter.

122 Bell, *Narrative design*, 14.

6. Theory into Practice – How to Write Basic Prosaic and Poetic Form – the Sonnet and the Short Story

This chapter should provide a practical guide to writing two literary forms: the short story and the sonnet. As a result of an extensive methodological research, I have compiled a basic set of rules to guide beginner writers in their quest for an accomplished work of written art, whether poetic or prosaic.

Written practice of poetry especially needs the rules of form because only when an author learns to use them (fill the traditional form with their own words), they can bend and shape them according to their own will and needs of poetic expression. Richard Hugo provides a great tool of learning how to criticize other people's work in order to learn how to criticize oneself – killing two birds with one stone: “[I]f I can, I talk as if I'd written the poem myself and try to find out why and where I went wrong.”¹²³ He is not identifying with the author, he is imagining how a poem came to be in order to decipher what formal issues it may contain.

Poetry is self-explanatory, “[t]he need for the poem to have been written is evident in

123 Hugo, *Triggering Town*, xii.

the poem.”¹²⁴ It is also self-contained and encapsulates its own tiny universe of imagery related to the real world in a specific way, one that is not to be dwelled upon whilst creating:

“Never worry about the reader. [...] Assuming you can write clear English sentences, give up all worry about communication. If you want to communicate, use the telephone.”¹²⁵

The point Hugo takes on is that poetry is obscured language, with some kind of special obstacle that is the most important part of it. Communication is possible but not primary, because the reader may take any message they read into its language. He also examines the choice of the subject of poetry: “Subjects that ought to have poems have a bad habit of wanting lots of other things at the same time. And you provide those things at the expense of your imagination.”¹²⁶ Working with clichés is absolutely indispensable for a poet – original topics of poetry are scarce, and the (de)connection of conventional imagery is the poet's main source of material.

6.1. The Sonnet

The choice of the sonnet was made for its short and pure (yet slightly) messy content – it ranges from a simple answer to a question in a poetic form to a free flow of iambic verse with a final couplet outburst of expression. The former was molded by the hands of Petrarca in the early 14th century and the latter is the 16th century version of Shakespeare¹²⁷. The main difference between the two is that Shakespeare introduced the final couplet into the form¹²⁸, which enables a certain degree of conclusion in the poem. It was also the form I chose my students would do.

124 *Ibid*, 7.

125 *Ibid*, 5.

126 *Ibid*, 5.

127 Strand and Boland, *Making of a Poem*, 56ff.

128 *Ibid*, 57.

The most concise definition of the poetic force motivating the sonnet is the “imagistic compression of argument”¹²⁹. The sonnet has a logical yet lyrical intention to display. This fourteen-line love poem (traditionally) has transitioned from its rigid rules into being exploited by poets as an exercise of form, as just another convenient rhythmic (un)rhymed mean of expression. Strand and Boland go as far as to call it a “part of speech.”¹³⁰ This provides another dimension to the comparison Lorde makes that we mentioned in the previous chapter – a sonnet can be one representative image of character, a completed functioning unit of imagery that makes commentary in relation to the other realized sonnets.

The Darwinian sonnet mentioned in the previous chapter contained a compelling contrast that created some wonderful reactions. This is one of them, in the Shakespearean version of form (although the iambic rhythm of verses is not strictly maintained), entitled “Survival sonnet” by Barbora Hrabalová:

“Hunted down, slithered
and snapped out of living.
Ripped and disfigured
sweet victim of killing.

A snake and a mouse
and early lost battle.
Some shampoo, a louse
with no means to settle.

Sir Darwin, the master,
the preacher of death
said: Too slow, be faster
or take your last breath.

129 *Ibid*, 58.

130 *Ibid*, 58.

But if to the slowest life isn't fair
Explain to me, please, the koala bear.”

The student understood absolutely and exactly the purpose of a sonnet. A rather violent build-up of misinterpretation of the theory of evolution is abruptly, and self-mockingly interrupted by a final, cute pun. Keeping the formal properties in mind, all one has to do is fill them with the proper words and images that are in compliance with the theme chosen.

6.2 The Short Story

Since I am not an accomplished author in terms of long narratives and covering the whole range of what constitutes a novel and its creation is not feasible on a few pages, I have chosen to share the methodology of writing a short story. It is best to start with the smallest possible size because it teaches the writer the importance of being concise and to the point. In a way, the creative mechanisms of a short short story are similar to the ones of a poem. If we set aside the purely lyrical poems that were written to incite emotion and nothing else (note: this does not mean they are somehow less important than other poetic works of art, they just do not suit the comparison), a poem is a very compressed narrative, stripped down to the bare essentials of thought and/or impression. How to define a short story? There are many contrastive views and the debate raised by this question has existed since its rise to popularity in the 19th century thanks to Edgar Allan Poe. Length may be considered as a major indicator, although many scholars dismiss it as a relativist truism:

“Anything over forty thousand words is a novel. Anything less than twenty thousand words is a short story. The no-man's-land in between belongs by default to the novella. [...] The short story, however, 'has never had a hero.’”¹³¹

This argument proposed by Flannery O'Connor and supported by Rick DeMarinis seems right but it is a catch 22 – there is no traditional hero exactly because there is no space (due

131 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 4.

to length) in a short story to develop one. I also disagree with the fact that a short story cannot contain a hero – i.e. the main personal link of the reader to the story. There is less space for the reader to identify with the narrative since it is only a glimpse into a vast world, whereas the novel is a construction of several complex views of this vast world. The concentration of meaning in the more limited spatial and temporal of the short story requires a situational trigger. DeMarinis go as far as to define Cinderella as a novel heroine¹³². This is farfetched since fairy tales have the structure of a novel even though they have the length of a short story. Reconsidering the definition of short stories in terms of disregarding length is unnecessarily confusing. Furthermore, the princess principle (used in DeMarinis' argument) is examined considering only the traditional tales, but does not take in the novels inspired by these, such as *Still Life with Woodpecker* by Tom Robbins, where the princess myth is reexamined from a 20th century perspective¹³³. DeMarinis claims that the “essence of the modern short story [is that i]t takes a hard close-up look at small bits of life. It does not lend itself to sentimentality and romance.”¹³⁴ This is a very general claim that cannot be applied to all stories at once at all. Short stories may incite the effects of sentimentality, as well as romance. A novel can also have this exact same role, by achieving a more general view via a sum of these stories. That is why some novels are composed of chapters that function as individual short stories.

This is the case of the story “The Usual”¹³⁵ included in the addendum. It started as a short story, but as I introduced the characters into the narrative, the story began to resemble more a beginning chapter of a novel. It works both ways.

DeMarinis has another faulty argument that borders on the definitions of inadequate advice: “You write the short story for love—not for money, fame, or tenure. Love is the only acceptable motive.”¹³⁶ This generalization is too dismissive of other motives (why not write

132 *Ibid*, 5.

133 Robbins, *Still Life*, 15.

134 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 5.

135 See addendum, p. 72.

136 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 6.

a short story for a contest?), and it may be considered confusing since he does not provide a definition for this vague and idealistic “love.” This four-letter word is too open for interpretation and motivation, and perhaps contains too many connotations and denotations to be acceptable as helpful. I propose that the short story could be written for the pure joy of accomplishment of recounting (an) interesting and surprising scene(s) and situation(s).

One of the most basic impulses to write comes from wishing to become another (body, mind, object) that one isn't originally. Many novels and short stories are written from points of view the author would normally never achieve or have, such as male writers borrowing female voices for their first person narrators and vice versa, for example. This is a short short story that I composed after imagining what kind of object I wished to be:

“When I grow up, I want to become a cardboard box. And when I'll be this cardboard box, I will be light and protective and soft and children will build forts out of me and my insides will be filled with the space of possibility, room, of emptiness patiently waiting to be filled with whatever the human being finds precious. I will travel, thousands of miles, carrying fragile things to distant places. I will be shelter for dogs lost in the rain. But all of this must wait for now, because I am a tree rooted in the woods, young and growing.”

This illustrates what narrative power is – the power to transpose yourself, as well as the reader, into another body, mind, element, or object. What is key to a successful story is to be able to construct ideal conditions for connecting with the reader's mind.

6.3 Overcoming Writer's Block

One of the phenomena that is most difficult to overcome is the writer's block. It is a very intimate issue when it comes to writing, a loss of power to create that applies to poets as well as prose writers, which is why this section is not included in one of the previous

subchapters. Creative writing manuals all deal with it differently, and the writer has many possibilities to choose from according to what is the nature and/or source of the block. It is again a scale of possibilities that range from abandoning your writing for other types of mental activities to forcing yourself to write even when you do not want to, or lack inspiration. The latter proposition is supported by DeMarinis' following claim:

“The very act of writing sentences produces more sentences. And sometimes (not always) these sentences lead you to an inspiration. At which point you say a little prayer of thanks and sail on.”¹³⁷

This approach is very closely linked with automatic writing, since to force yourself to write is a conscious approach to get into the inactive subconscious and activate it, to find the trigger, or subject of your writing even if you do not have it at the moment.

DeMarinis goes as far as to dismiss the whole phenomenon: “If you think you have 'writer's block' (a fraudulent term if there ever was one), then do what poet William Stafford suggests: *Lower your standards.*”¹³⁸ True, it is much easier to be satisfied when one accepts mediocrity, but to dismiss a whole universal phenomenon that writers experience as bogus is insulting. The inability to write may be considered as an overwhelming mental block but that does not mean it is not real, or simply made up consciously for no reason. He explains this position by stating that

“[b]eginning writers (and sometimes experienced writers) find themselves stymied by a need to write with nothing less than journeyman brilliance. They've read the classics, they've read their famous contemporaries, and now they find themselves attempting to do what these others have done so memorably.”¹³⁹

137 DeMarinis, *Craft of the Short Story*, 20.

138 *Ibid*, 23.

139 *Ibid*, 23.

This is true, however, I would argue that there is one more option: the writer is trying NOT to write like the classics or his or her contemporaries since he or she knows that this or that particular style has been explored. This quest for novelty implies a struggle, a striving for originality that might become overwhelming to an excessive extent. Again, the universality in overcoming writer's block does not exist. What helps one might not help the other. What works for me is willing to write something that I myself would want to read. I also strongly agree with Tom Robbins' 25 dollar criterion (see chapter 4). Furthermore, a complementary action to writing is reading. To work out how to get your own ideas on paper even if you have them – sometimes writer's block is purely formal – is to see what other writers apply to propel their ideas.

7. Conclusion

Considering the vast amount of advice that has sprung up about creative writing during the last century, a beginning writer must look attentively through to find useful advice. Self-reflective criticism is one of the key aspects of becoming an accomplished writer, along with searching for voice and themes with appropriate formal realizations.

Easier said than done. The scholarly approach may prove quite tiresome when it comes to the process of natural creativity. There can be posterior analysis of it, even writers themselves do that in their autobiographies, but the creative process remains intact throughout its realization. However, applying methods included in scholarly materials to the creative process is helpful.

There are obvious differences between the creative processes of prose and poetry. Whatever the intention for the writing is, even more, whatever the form is, there are specific guidelines to each. However, writers are permitted to consciously violate these laws for achieving better formulation of their narratives or poems. They have to accept the paradoxical nature of writing, whatever their method may be, ranging from stream of consciousness automatism to rendering a specific situation into a narrative with intense formulaic authenticity. The sense of right or wrong and strict truth does not apply universally in the field of creative writing, but where would science be without self-doubt? Accurate rendering of stories and poems into readers' minds is the common goal of all writers, and appropriate self-doubt is a requirement for quality fiction and poetry.

While motivation and stylization may be opaque and various, what a writer must do is to have an open mind towards language – whether their own words, triggers, criticism of their work from others. The means for opening a mind are highly individual, and any willing

writer seeks them enthusiastically. They may be theoretical, included in manuals, or other writer's minds, or may be completely random triggers perceivable in real life. To each their own.

What creative writing boils down to is triggers. This inspirational unit is discussed and proposed by many authors and scholars. It cannot be controlled, it can only be quietly perceived and accepted, and afterwards worked and reworked with. The fusion of group work with individual approach is possible. It is what writers have been doing from the dawn of fiction, and they will be doing it in the future.

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ADDENDUM

DRAMA QUEEN

My sleeveless dress covered the wound without trouble.

END

The ground shook and there was little time to...

BOREDOM

And then the dust of the day disappeared under her inspective fingers.

LUST OF THE DAY

In the clear light of morning, just as the sky turns that kitsch pink with the first glimpses of the sun, their steps resonate with even more acuteness.

A CONFESSION

My mother always told me to shut up.

GRAPHOPHILIA

If my pen is leaking, does it mean it's aroused?

WITHOUT

Wit is without hout.

UTOPIA

They needed to be careful, a single wrong step could destroy them not.

CHECK-MATE

He pointed the gun at her at the same time he realized that all the bullets were in the

bottom drawer.

THEOLOGY

A mere one hour could lead to infinity.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Biology doesn't *make* you breathe, *itenables* you to breathe.

FOR THE LOVE OF MILES

Bitches brew but witches make the stew.

The usual?

Slowly, we turned to the exit. Our ship docked. I stood in the crowd looking over people's heads to find her on the bank. "Look for the red hat." That's what she told me. Trouble was, there were two ladies wearing red hats. I stopped and leaned over the railing to watch them, waiting for the mass of people to dissipate. After a while, I remarked that both of the ladies went away with people they were waiting for.

"Miss."

"Aah! Sorry, you startled me."

"I must ask you to leave now." said the steward.

I dragged my feet through the docks, the elephant-like sirens of the ships cutting the mist of the port's jungle of people shouting, crying, swooning, laughing. I felt helpless, unwelcome. I bought an orange for my last scraps of change. And then I heard it.

Nothing that I heard before could be compared to how the woman sang. I stood in the street, mesmerized, jaws dropped, holding my half-peeled orange, staring at the bar before me where the voice came from. It was strange. Although it had windows, they were covered by thick black velvet drapes from the inside. Nobody walking past it seemed to notice the beautiful music coming from it. The Red Hat.

"Look out!" someone yelled.

The car knocked me over. I stood up, limping a little, and entered. There she was behind the bar.

"Lucille!"

She looked at me and smiled.

“Well there you are, sweetie, nice of you to finally show up!”

The bar was packed. But when I looked closely, the people were mostly sitting in pairs, discussing some private matter, not minding anything else. The voice of the singer floated above all the humming. She was standing on a small stage next to the bar. An epitome, a sudden revelation. She was huge, voluptuous, curvy, dressed in a dark velvet purple dress. It seemed as if her voice smoothed its way, all velvet-like, out of the deepest corners of her lungs, bursting and beating on the walls of her throat, just to finally get free through her perfectly curved lips.

“Well don't just stand there gawking, come here!”

I went up to the bar, still keeping my eyes on the singer, trying to detach my attention from her to Lucille.

“Well, sweetness? What will it be?”

“I thought I would start working right away.”

“Nonsense, first you have to get to know the place. The customers' point of view, the way we do things around here, the whole deal.”

“Oh... all right. I'll have a gin tonic.”

“Now. See that couple over there? The girl in the red dress and the Humphrey Bogart look-alike that thinks he doesn't have to take off his hat inside? Never go even close to them. She comes to the bar to order so he never has to speak to anybody.

Then we have Howard and Harry, our token fighters. They start every day with a very polite conversation that just ends up in disaster. When they pick up a fight, don't get in their way, they need to get it out of their system. They never hurt anybody.

Next to them are Cherry and Emily, two sad sisters who never married or had children. See what they're doing?”

“Crossword puzzles?”

“Naah, writing! Every two hours they switch their papers and carry on as if nothing happened. If you ask politely, they will read you a bit, it's worth it. They take black tea with milk and extra brown sugar every morning at 9:15. Don't ask me why, I bet it gets them

started. You following me?"

"Yup."

"The guys sitting in the back are Ernest and Joseph. Never make fun of their accents. And never let them insult you. Ernest drinks rum and Joseph takes vodka. They're the oldest customers."

Lucille paused and looked around.

"Well, those are the most important couples. Oh wait, Doris is our singer. When she gets tired, she sits at the bar with me and drinks Bloody Marys. Do you know how to make a proper Bloody Mary? Good. She has some great stories, just ask her. The pianist that plays with her is Eddie. He keeps to himself, only speaks through his music. A whiskey drinker, never pour him a bourbon."

"Got it."

"Now. See that old gentleman over there? The only one that is sitting alone? Here, take this apron and go ask him what he would like to order."

I gave my coat to Lucille, fastened the apron, finished my gin tonic and walked up to the gentleman. He was sipping his last drops of scotch on the rocks and eating peanuts. The strange thing about him was how he ate them. He examined the bowl for a long time before he picked one up. When he found it, he gently took it with three fingers of his black hand and held it up in the dim light, looking at it as though it was a miniature sculpture. He caressed every curve, every little fold and dent. Only when he found a certain criterion (which was unknown to me), he put the peanut in his mouth and crunched it with such gusto that he had to close his eyes. I stood there for about two minutes till he noticed me and smiled.

"He-hello, sir. Would you like another one?" I pointed at the empty glass.

"Why don't you sit down, young lady."

"No, thank you, sir. I just wanted to kno-..."

"Ah! Polite and suspicious, yes, a wonderful breed of woman. Nothing to be worried about here. Please, do sit down. If you want the job, you have to sit down."

“Oh. Alright.” Only then have I got the full view of the man. He was very peculiar. Well-trimmed grey hair, a handsomely crooked nose, well-kept silver moustache. It seemed as though he had wrinkles, but each time you focused on a particular facial area and wanted to inspect them, they disappeared.

“So I understand that you want to work here, as a barmaid. Why?”

“This is the only place where I can work.”

He appeared to be puzzled by my answer, but not for long.

“How do you know Lucille.” This sounded more like a statement.

“How do you know Lucille?” I answered, and he smiled.

“You are a very clever young lady. One last question. Is there anything you regret?”

“I lost my orange in the street a few moments ago. It's a shame it went to waste.”

“If you want, you can go look for it, maybe it's still there.”

I stood up, walked to the glass door and as I was reaching for the doorknob, I saw myself. I was there. Outside. I was lying on the pavement. The car that knocked me over was still there, its owner talking to the police. The paramedics were pulling out a black plastic bag. Right there, in my outstretched left hand, lay the half-peeled orange.

S & M

There was once a little girl with a watermelon head. The rest of her was normal, five fingers on each hand and foot, two eyes, two ears, a nose and a mouth. She just had to wear large hats, couldn't swim and was a bit slow when it came to counting. She couldn't add or multiply numbers larger to the number of seeds she had in her head. She was lucky to come from a wealthy family so she never was in danger of getting eaten by her parents. Her name was Madeleine, or as everyone called her, Melly.

She had few friends, though. People made her cry and that made her dry. She just had a pet rabbit Oscar, trained to eat spinach, that she liked to take to the park with her friend Sally. Sally always helped Melly with her math troubles, went hat shopping with her and played cards on the beach while other kids swam in the sea.

One day, Sally, Melly and Oscar decided to change location for their afternoon walk and talk and turned left, to the royal garden. It was huge, savage, almost forest-like. They walked for a long time till they found a good spot for their picnic. When they finally did and ate their lunch, they grew drowsy and dozed off, right in the middle of the savage garden. Oscar, however, wasn't tired at all. He sniffed around, looking for fellow furry creatures, alert, for quite a long time. At last he found an interesting trail of scent to follow and disappeared in the bush.

Sally woke up after a while, yawning. Something was odd. She was alone. No, not alone. "Melly? ...i-is tha-at you? Wh-where is your...?"

Melly opened her eyes and there was a huge, exquisitely laid table with glittering silverware and china. In front of her head stood a steaming silver plate with a roasted rabbit. That was the last thing she saw before the knife cut through her face.

Anonymous review n.1

The author plays with the images he or she (probably she) lets the reader see, the author also skillfully manipulates with what the reader ~~is~~ cannot see - suddenly switching attention to Gally who ~~we~~ we tend to think does ~~not~~ play ~~is~~ play a rather supporting role because of not being "special" in the ~~in~~ Melly way.

However to the reader it may not make very much sense, the contrast ~~is~~ of her name in the title of the story and then the ~~image~~ ^{magical realism.} of the story being about Melly. ^{(~~is~~ surrealism (surrealism))}

i felt like it should not be ~~is~~ ~~connected~~ by to be made an essay upon. Alice in wonderland?

imaginary friend - Melly
father king vs mother queen - revenge on the other one

Anonymous review n.2

S & M

I found your story beautifully creepy and I believe there's a lot of people who will really enjoy it. What you should probably try to make better - if you added one more sentence to the ending, it would really help the story, now it feels unfinished and it also leaves us with far too many questions; think about changing the sentence right after Sally wakes up, after reading about Oscar the rabbit in the paragraph before, we automatically finish the question with the word "rabbit."

I think your stories of this sort have great potential, I'm looking forward to read more.

Also, I really loved the connection between the number of seeds in Kelly's head and her trouble with maths.