



PHILOSOPHY

59.2 I feel that the final purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary to exacerbate, the moral consciousness of people. In particular, I think the novel at its best is the most moral of art forms because it's the most immediate, the most overbearing, the most inescapable. One could argue about the meaning of a non-objective painting or of a musical piece, but in a novel, the brunt of the meaning is there. Because one is using words, the novel is much closer to the sense of commandments, moral strictures, and, most important, moral ambiguities. You are exploring the interstices of human behavior—which is the first approach to religious experience for many of us, especially since the organized religions don't begin to cover the enormous and often terrible complexities of moral experience.

75.11 It is an extraordinary business to say you are going to write a novel. You are creating a world. When you have been writing for as many years as I have, you come to know that the God-like presumption of writing a novel may be intoxicating but it is never comfortable. You have become the prime mover of a world that you are fashioning.

79.26 Why do I think fiction is so important? For me there's nothing more beautiful than a marvelous novel. To be able to come up with a vision that is close enough to Godlike to give us a vision of how marvelous the Lord's mind might be--that partakes of beauty. When we read Proust or Stendhal or Joyce or any of the great novelists, name twenty, they give us this idea that God's mind might even be something like this. Don't you get the feeling when you read Tolstoy or Mann, or Faulkner, or, on occasion, Hemingway, that one special side of God's mind is close to theirs? That is the challenge.

82.14 As you get older, you realize that finally you must follow Voltaire and cultivate your own garden. You do it on the assumption that you can still produce an herb that will challenge much that is before us. Instead of seeing yourself as the embattled artist, you now pose in your heart as the alchemical artist. Art as magic rather than art as war.

83.10 I'm right and I'm wrong so often, that I have no interest in forcing people to think the way I do. I'm interested, rather, that people get better at thinking. If a book is good enough, you cannot predict how people are going to react. You shouldn't be able to. Provided it's good enough, it is not manipulative, and everyone, therefore, can go off in a different direction. I don't think it's an accident that I'm a novelist. We have a wicked point of view—wicked as opposed to evil. We are interested in upping the ante, so that more happens, not less. Evil is to know that the fruit of your efforts will be cruel but you proceed anyway. Wicked people do not know the results of their actions--they just know they are stimulating a change in the given. How it will turn out is anyone's guess.

83.10 Back in 1959, Ralph Ellison and I were out in Iowa together on a literary symposium gotten together by Esquire. We had a lively audience, and the show went on for several excited and intense days. At the end, it seemed a little absurd to me that we had really worked that hard, gotten in so many arguments with students and attendant academics, and even argued with each other as lively as hell. When it was over, there was even a bit of sadness that something which had become a bit exceptional was done. So I said to Ellison, "Why the hell did we do it? Why did we work so hard?" He said, "Man, we're expendable." I've always loved that remark. Because in a certain sense, one's work is just that, expendable. If the best of my ideas succeeds in changing the mind of someone who's more intelligent than myself, fine. If you advance an idea as far as you can and it's overtaken and improved by someone who will argue on the opposite side, then in effect you have improved your enemy's mind. You can, however, feel the confidence that someone will come along on your side who will take your enemy's improvement of your idea and lift it up a little higher on your side. I'm nothing if not a believer in the dialectic. Democracy is the living throbbing social embodiment of that thesis, antithesis, synthesis and new antithesis.

81.16 Hemingway's life was cautionary to me. Several times in my life I think I veered away from doing certain things because of the final example he set. His suicide stood out as if our own father had taken his life, for Hemingway is the father of modern American literature, at least for me. I keep thinking of John Gardner's marvelous remark that when a father commits suicide he condemns his son to the same end. Well, of course, you can go to suicide in more ways than killing yourself. You can rot yourself out with too much drink, too many cigarettes, too many failures, too much talk, too many wild and unachieved alliances—Hemingway was a great cautioning influence on us. One learned not to live on one's airs.

81.16 Yes, Borges is a conservative but I detest having to think of a writer by his politics first. It's like studying people by way of their anus. Borges has a magical ability to turn plots inside out. A magician's magician. I sometimes think he does in five pages what Pynchon does in 500. By his literary deeds, Borges poses the difficulty of comprehending reality. He shows us that every time our mind approaches reality, we are writing a scenario within to comprehend it. The scenario is the equivalent of an hypothesis. And the hypothesis seems correct until new evidence subverts it. Yet, in the course of this subversion, we learn a great deal. The revised hypothesis, ideally, should be superior. Reading Borges, you live in this highly diverting and not always agreeable business of seeing elaborate hypotheses destroyed by the one fact that is able to turn the hypothesis inside-out. You are given, for example, a sinewy dialectical vision of the interplay between culture and history. You learn that the two are virtually separate organisms. Borges gives us an immensely vivid inner intellectual life which is, I think, what one finally looks for most in serious reading. Our inner life not only becomes more vivid, but is better able to stand up against the attacks of the world upon our psyche--not so much the world itself, as the subtle, insidious processes of the more pervasive and mediocre elements in the world of communications. That is all over us daily like a giant squid. Borges is always teaching us that it is not enough to live with Aquinas' dictum: Trust the evidence of your senses. Rather, trust them until they are dramatically revealed as inadequate, tricked or downright betrayed—then go find new senses. Borges is not the least bit easy.

83.30 The moment you moralize in your novel, your book is no longer moral, it has become pious. Piety not only destroys morality, but consorts intimately and comfortably with corruption. Piety and corruption get together like hot dogs and mustard. They have to. No one can fulfill the demands of piety; it is too inhuman a demand. So, it inspires its opposite--just for the sheer health of the body, if not the soul. Whereas morality, when subtle, brings proportion to human affairs. Tolstoy is a great writer, maybe he is our greatest novelist, because no other can match his sense of human proportion. We feel awe supported by compassion when we read Tolstoy. A remarkable achievement. To be in the presence of something so judgmental, so severe, and yet ultimately tender.

82.16 Anyone who worries about whether they are going to hurt somebody's feelings by their work is no more a writer than a surgeon who says to himself, "In making this incision, I am going to give this young woman a scar on her belly that could injure her love life for the next thirty years." The surgeon says, "Scalpel, nurse," and makes the cut. He may be right or wrong in the need for the operation, but he keeps a necessary insensitivity to the rest of the context. Writers also have their own kind of blinders. They can't say to themselves, "This portrait is going to scar my good friend." Or my father Or my sister. If they feel that, they can't write. Indeed, a great many young writers think of all the people they're going to hurt, or, worse, those they're going to make enemies of, and begin to brood on the retribution that will ensue--now, it doesn't seem worth it all. So, there has to be something a bit maniacal about a young man or woman who would be a writer. He or she has to be willing to get that book out no matter how many psychic casualties are left in its passage. On the other hand, a good young writer does well not to take an immediate advantage over people he dislikes by dumping on them in his book. It's a bad habit to cash such easy checks. Ergo, the moral vision of the young writer must walk a tightrope.

82.16 Writing may be an instinctive process, but it's not always clear what the instinct is saying. Sometimes you feel no more than a dull pressure to go in a certain direction for the oncoming chapter. You have to be able to hear the faint voice that prods you toward an honest continuation of the work. That can be hard to hear. A writer is also open to many a pressure to take the immediate advantage, even if it doesn't feel quite right. And we all do that in various ways. And pay for it with endless falsities, flawed stimulants, or timid restrictions of our intent.

81.26 I may not be a good intellectual, but my avocation is, nonetheless, to create intellections. I put them on like adhesive plasters. In the case of Gary Gilmore, however, I had to pull off the Band-aids. As I got deeper and deeper into what Gilmore's nature might be, I decided that every concept I had about him was inadequate. So I wanted the reader of The Executioner's Song to confront the true complexity of one human. That state of perception will always arise by studying any person close enough. That he was a murderer made my task simpler because we are all fascinated with killers. But any person studied in depth will prove fascinating. It's Flaubert's idea. Take any soul alive, including that simple servant girl he wrote about, and they will prove incredible provided you get to know them well enough. It is certainly the yeast in any good marriage.

81.26 Obviously, Freud brought off a revolution in our consciousness of the human psyche. But we must restrict his insights to the nineteenth century. His final importance in intellectual history may be that he gives us more insight into the underside of that century than anyone but Marx. Freud is the key to understanding how people put up with the psychic weight of the kinds of lives they led in the 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s, locked up, terribly overstuffed, yet still engaged in lives with a considerable amount of power, energy, and pressure. In those days the psyche was used like a plumbing system. People were accustomed to living under high pressure, and finding ways, no matter how bizarre, to open the steam valve. That's not what we have now. Today we know a world in which people act out many of their anxieties and look constantly for reassuring explanations of their conduct. Freud has become inadequate by now. Marx, for vastly more complex reasons, is also not adequate any longer, not wholly, because corporate capitalism adapted to Marx by way of Keynes. So I don't try to create a bridge in my mind from Marx to Freud, not anymore. I'm not certain I could have. But when I wrote "The White Negro," back in the fifties, I was ready to see that everything in society from the largest institutions to private and intimate personal moments might yet be connected as parts of a new and vast social vision. In a sense, I'm still trying. But I've come to realize that the task is enormous. Of course, I grew up under the shadow of Marx and Freud. Both men, independently, had a vision of existence. That impressed me immensely. I was nothing if not intellectually ambitious when I was young and wanted to come up with a similar weltanschauung (which was still a much-used word in the Forties and Fifties). By

now I've come to realize that I don't have the intellectual discipline to begin to do anything of that sort. Still, one does one's best with what one's got. I still attempt to connect up what I can. It's important. Until we understand the ways in which we are obliged to lead our lives in ways we don't particularly enjoy--"the mass of men enter into social and productive relations independent of their will." --Marx; until we understand all those reasons why so many of us feel dead inside so much of the time, yes, until we recognize how much of that is not entirely our lack of imagination but is also the product of vast institutional systems of greed, injustice, and manipulative advertising that we are schooled to perceive as relatively benign manifestations, we have arrived nowhere. The only way I can tell that something terrible is going on is that I feel a little duller than I ought to. Very often that's at the end of a long chain, you might say, of socially intended processes designed to keep us malleable, amenable, and short on such powerful emotions as outrage at injustice. In that sense, I still try to find the ultimate indictment against all that's awful and eventually evil in society--all the awfuls--plastic, high-rise, mall architecture, static, interruptions for commercials, making money out of money. It's all there if one can find the grid on which to locate them. A devil's grid.

95.35 Writers aren't taken seriously any more, and a large part of the blame must go to the writers of my generation, most certainly including myself. We haven't written the books that should have been written. We've spent too much time exploring ourselves. We haven't done the imaginative work that could have helped define America, and as a result, our average citizen does not grow in self-understanding. We just expand all over the place and this spread is about as attractive as collapsed and flabby dough on a stainless steel table.

[attach this to the MLA speech]

74.3 If I could give one moral maxim to a young writer, I'd say live with your cowardice.

Live with it every day. Recognize it, hate it or defend it, but don't try to slough it off.

Cowardice is a prime cause; apathy or writer's block is all too often the product.

74.3 Superstition? It's either the center of one's sanity or the edge of one's psychosis.

Paranoia is the most useful or the most destructive faculty of the human spirit. One never knows when it's devoted to your safety or to your ultimate breakdown.

74.3 You can tell a lot about every stage of sex—before, during and after—by odor. One knows one's own spiritual condition by one's scent. As one enters, one knows the happiness or the misery of the house by the smell one encounters. This faculty is therefore unendurable at times. You can walk in on old friends and realize that something's going to go bust with them, not yet, maybe, but it's there, maybe a month or two away, a year or two away. The odor speaks unmistakably of stale miseries.

73.46 I've long had the thought that when you have highly charged dramatic people in a confrontation—Shakespearean characters, for example—coincidences tend to occur. Indeed, if there is any order in the cosmos, it should not be so exceptional that this is so. If a general, let us say, is getting ready for battle, and there are gods and devils surrounding him, they are certainly involved in the outcome. Whether the general wins or loses the war on that day will have an effect on the fortunes of these gods. So they're going to be paying attention, aren't they? In turn, the general is going to be aware of them—at least insofar as he has any sensitivity to their presence. Such a man is not necessarily foolish or psychotic if he spends his last ten minutes in bed debating whether to put his left foot down on the floor first or the right. Perhaps he is calling on the left or the right echelon of his gods. We can also assume that these gods are going to be doing their best to create startling coincidences. A coincidence, after all, excites us with the livid sense that there's a superstructure about us, and in this superstructure are all sorts of agents of a presence (or a spiritual machine) larger than our imagination. When a warlike general bends his knee in prayer, it is as likely that he is calling upon a demon as invoking Jesus Christ.

74.5 An equation sign can also be seen as a statement of metaphor. When you say: "y equals x to the 2nd power," you are in effect establishing a metaphor. Or, the obverse: Some artist in a gallery, looking at a painting, says, "I see God in the yellow." All right, that can be stated mathematically. The Yellow in this painting is a function of God. Either way, artist or physicist is trying to penetrate into the substance of things. In that sense, the physicist and the artist are closer to one another than the artist and the gallery owner, or the physicist and the engineer.

74.5 While the physicist is stirred, if uncomfortably, by feeling a presence of magic in his experiment, and the artist is often drenched in statistical detail (since he has to deal with a world that grows more and more technical and difficult to comprehend), at bottom their interests are opposed. Finally, the physicist is trying to destroy the fundament of magic, and the artist is trying to undermine the base of technology. The artist believes (and this is the greatest generalization I can make) that all cosmic achievement is attainable within the human frame, that is, if we lead lives witty enough and skillful enough, bold enough and, finally, illumined enough, we can accomplish every communication, and reach every vault within the cosmos that technology would attempt to take by force. Telepathy rather than telephony.

74.5 The artist seeks to create a spell. Today, of course, the artist is no primitive man; he is all but completely insulated from the senses primitive man once had. By now, the artist usually acts as a mediator between magic and technology. But no matter how technologized he becomes, his central impulse is to create a spell equivalent to the spell a primitive felt when he passed a great oak and knew something deeper than his normal comprehension was reaching him. Perhaps the primitive felt close to what we feel when we see a great work of painting on a wall. We are near then to something we can't even quite call knowledge. It's larger, less definable. It is certainly more resonant.

85.15 The artist for whom I feel the greatest kinship is Picasso. He was interested in various attacks on the nature of reality, and he preferred to make each attack from a separate base. He'd move his techniques and his psyche and his wit and housekeeping and assorted spiritual equipment over to the other side of the mountain.

What I find most interesting in writing at this point is to keep making a new attack on the nature of reality. It's as if reality has some subtle desire to protect itself. If we keep pushing forward in the same direction, reality is able to handle us, or evade us, and may even do it in much the same way organisms become resistant to various antibiotics, pesticides and herbicides.

Schroeder/1992 I try not to be intentionally didactic. I don't like to say to myself, "I want to get this idea across to readers." Rather, I try to create a state of consciousness in the reader that will accommodate the material I am presenting. My hope is that my work will change their minds. Be it understood! I don't want to change everybody's mind in one direction—that's propaganda. Rather than move all my readers ten degrees to the left; I would be happier if I nudged some to the left, while others were swinging to the right. My fundamental belief about a good society is that the cops get better and so do the crooks.

83.55 The great economists pondered the interchange of human energy and looked for those means and ways that such energy could be augmented institutionally or dissipated or even destroyed. In that sense, Das Kapital is a phenomenological novel with commodities serving (and experiencing an extraordinarily vital life) as protagonists. The commodities gain and lose energy just as humans do in novels. Perhaps in future years we will yet find some magnificent writer, probably not yet born, who will transcend the categories and write a work to marry those visions of society that have to do with how we offer human energy to each other, and steal it from one another, augment it, divert it.

91.3 I've always felt that there was a good deal of compatibility between La Rochefoucauld and Gore Vidal. I say this critically. One of the largest arguments I have with Vidal and his mind and his work is that it represents the end of an intellectual tradition that began with La Rochefoucauld. Many of Vidal's remarks stand up, I think, in comparison. For example: "Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies." No one can accuse him of not being able to turn a good line. What I argue, however, is that that particular tradition has become inadequate for our present intellectual needs. The world is getting so genuinely complex (and perplexed) that it's almost hopeless to enclose it with aphorisms, no matter how brilliant.

For example: Not everything wilts when another novelist succeeds. There is also admiration, unwanted, it is true, but then, whoever insisted that we are absolutely without treachery to ourselves? Sometimes there is even an honest seed of congratulation burgeoning away in all that compost of envy.

91.3a While we are on aphorisms, there is that whole remark of Tolstoy's: "It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness." One can add: Yes, agreed. At the least, successful collaboration between good and evil, which is why Tolstoy distrusted it so.

[Coll]

97.24 One of the things we do as writers is to keep postponing certain books we want to write. But when we get to the point where we think we are ready to do them, we no longer can. The relevant stuff has decomposed. You could write a collective biographical work about all the writers of my generation and how in our separate ways each of us got eaten out a little more than we expected, until we couldn't bring off all the things we thought we could.

Goodale/2000 Cynicism is okay for quick results. Topical writing is best when sharp and biting. Cynicism is perfect for that. But it's impossible to become a truly good novelist without undertaking some philosophical search somewhere in the course of your life. Cynicism can poison your highest faculties.

95.28 I don't think it's possible any more to write the great American novel. I speak of a huge, panoramic novel like Dos Passos's U.S.A. That was written at a time when there was still an illusion that you could encompass this country. I don't believe you can any more. Each section of the social pie has gotten specialized. Novels are much more detailed today than when I was young. You can't fake it anymore. Nor can you accumulate that much knowledge. Maybe one writer with enormous resources could write the great American novel if that was the only book he or she wrote.

95.37 One can say that if Picasso had been braver at certain points in his life, he might have been a more generous artist. Some of the cruelty might have gone out of his work. Something grand might have come in. He had enormous talent; he was, arguably, the greatest painter since Michelangelo. With generosity, maybe Picasso would have been nobler, but the odds are that he would have been less. Because the selfishness of the artist is often there to protect the part that is generous. To the degree that artists give of themselves to all people in a certain way, they don't want to give anything at all in other ways. There's an economy to generosity. And very often, the people who are the most generous are not the most talented. I think the sanction that the artist gives himself or herself is that they've got to be selfish—absolutely!--or nothing will get done.

95.38 A great many artists are narcissists—certainly writers. That's because they're always consulting themselves. The basic joke about a writer is that no matter how much he is suffering, a small part of him is taking notes. Even as the love of his life is walking out the door, he takes notes on his condition. "How interesting, my left foot is now colder than my right foot." In Picasso's case, narcissism is too small a word. I think he saw himself as an intermediary between humankind and the forces that created the world and kept it in upheaval. I think he saw himself as a demiurge.

92.12 Every gain of freedom carries its price. There's wonderful moment when you go from oppression to freedom, there in the middle, when one's still oppressed but one's achieved the first freedoms. That's an extraordinary period. Then the freedoms begin to outweigh the oppression. By the time you get over to complete freedom, you begin to look back almost nostalgically on the days of oppression, because in those days you had a sense of importance, you could take yourself seriously, you were fighting the good fight, you were ready to become a martyr. Now, we are at the point where we don't even know what our freedoms are worth.

92.12 I can see some reasonably deep moral questions about whether people should be free to create hard-core pornography. I'd say yes, but let's not assume no damage is taking place. For some, it would be a curse, to others, a perverse blessing. But you're playing with your soul when you start being photographed in the sexual act. On the other hand, I don't think it's up to the government to forbid it. Let's say the moral shadings are analogous to men doing their best to knock each out in the ring while other men and women cheer them on. Note that I put it this way even though boxing is my favorite sport to watch.

Vitka/1984 You cannot have a great democracy without great writers. I believe that if great novels disappear, as they are in danger of doing, and our story-telling culture becomes television, then I think we will be that much nearer to benign fascism. One of the correctives in a democracy is novels, not just great novels, but trenchant novels that keep reinvigorating our view of how bad and corrupting a life can be as well as how good.

84.29 The greatest writer I ever read was Karl Marx. He changed the way I perceived society. It doesn't mean that I'm literally a Marxist, but he taught me how to think better.

He was like a great football coach who enabled you to get the most out of your body.

85.3 We tell ourselves stories in order to make sense of life. Narrative is reassuring. There are days when life is so absurd it's crippling—nothing makes sense. So we tell stories to bring order to the absurdity. Relief is provided by the narrative's beginning, middle and end. Without an end, you have an obsession, a constant circling around a fact or situation that cannot be put in place.

83.39 I grew up at a time when writers were important. They were for my generation, what rock stars are to my kids today. When I was in college, if I had heard that Ernest Hemingway was going to speak in Worcester, Mass., I might have trudged the 40 miles from Cambridge. That was how we felt then about writers. In my view, maintaining the chalice of fiction at all costs was what the writer of talent was committed to. The shock came when I realized that this view of the writer doesn't hold any longer.

jmlennon1

From: jm wordcraft <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>
To: jmlennon1 <jmlennon1@attbi.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 6:04 PM
Subject: Re: Fw: "with sources" version

you wrote:

<<<Are you also faxing to NM? If so, I'll> just save on my hard drive.>>>

NO, Mike-- If you'll please review my long message to you with the other file, you'll I'd appreciate your printing BOTH. I will have a lot of faxing (plus an AWFUL lot of typing) and would appreciate your printing the "without sources" version for Himself. I will ONLY fax the UNRETYPEED pages, and alas, since you're there, it will fall to you to Xerox them and assemble them into a final chapter.

When Norris gets home and gets her feet under her (she will arrive Thursday, we hope) she can take over printing the "without sources" but until then, I'd appreciate your doing the honors.

Remember, Staples accepts phone orders and delivers next day if you phone before 3pm.

Judith

--- jmlennon1 <jmlennon1@attbi.com> wrote:

>

> ----- Original Message -----

> From: lennon <lennon@wilkes.edu>

> To: jm wordcraft <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>

> Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 3:44 PM

> Subject: Re: "with sources" version

>

>

>> Judith,

>> Got LitBiz6 with and w/o sources. Are you also faxing to NM? If so,

> I'll

>> just save on my hard drive. I have already gone through it in rough form.

>> He's home: I saw him at the airport and told him the fax was functioning.

>> The news from Arkansas sounds encouraging.

>> Best,

>> Mike

>> ----- Original Message -----

>> From: jm wordcraft <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>

5/21/02

>> To: Mike Lennon <lennon@wilkes.edu>; Mike Lennon
 > <jmlennon1@attbi.com>
 >> Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 2:52 PM
 >> Subject: "with sources" version
 >>
 >>
 >>> Here is:
 >>>
 >>> LitBizfinal6CWS.doc
 >>>
 >>> PS__this doesn't make a shred of sense--this file "reads" as 134K
 > but
 >>> only 44 pages show on the screen and that is all that should be
 > printed.
 >>>
 >>>
 >>> Do You Yahoo!?
 >>> LAUNCH - Your Yahoo! Music Experience
 >>> <http://launch.yahoo.com>
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jmlennon1

From: jm wordcraft <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>
To: Mike Lennon <lennon@wilkes.edu>; Mike Lennon <jmlennon1@attbi.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 2:43 PM
Attach: LitBizfinal6C.doc
Subject: begining of lit biz, next pass

OK, this one will finally be a monster, broken up into several parts.

The breaks will come when NM has put in a huge run of pages straight from books that don't need retyping. I will number them to follow the appropriate computer page, then start the next computer file with the appropriate page.

So, for now, I'm attaching:

Litbizfinal6CWS.doc
This is With Sources for you

there is also
Litbizfinal6C.doc
that one is minus the sources and is for NM

Now, I will number and fax an entire essay "The Last Draft of The Deer Park" which fits in after p.44 (last page of above 2 files.) I'm afraid you'll have to run it through the Xerox (or the copy function of the fax machine) to have a copy for each printout. I fear it will fall to you, Michael, to assemble these computer files and faxed pages into actual ms. Sorry, but that's the only expeditious way I can think of to handle it, as there isn't world enough and time to retype it all.

Just by the way, if for any reason these files refuse to open on your machine, I'm going to the Carmelites.

Judith

PS: I see each file runs 77K so the second one gets its own message.

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5/21/02

I LIT BIZ

It is interesting that my formal sense intensifies as I grow older and so I have looked to assemble this book in time to come out on January 31, 2003. I will be exactly eighty years old on that occasion.

Television has destroyed that to a huge degree. It has cut the attention span of children. By now, to most people in America, a narrative is something that doesn't go on for too long—usually, it is cut short at seven minutes. It can remain intact as long as twelve minutes before a new commercial comes on. And in that manner are our emotions deadened. The need for quick injections of amusement or wit becomes paramount. Aesthetics becomes one-liners.

WRITING NOVELS

As for the title, a good deal of hesitation went into the adjective. Spooky is virtually a child's word and seemed too casual. Besides, it does not always apply. Not all days at one's desk are odd or subtly frightening, or, for that matter, full of scary fun. Novel writing can also be dogged. There are unproductive hours that feel like nothing so much as the act of trying to start an old car when the motor has gone dead on you.

Nor is that a geriatric analogy. It is usually young men who have old cars. Moreover, there is no sense of youth that a young man can feel on a truly bad day of writing. (Only the old can be aware of the true abyss of inexperience. Young novelists do get to feel like old men on such unhappy occasions as if whatever talent they once possessed is now gone. Nevermore! The first intimations of old age for many a young novelist is the day when the gift does not appear, or, comes through hobbled. Scenes that one expected to be rich are without life on the page. One's inner life, that exceptional sense of oneself as possessed of an inner life that is not like others—is absent. The scene one is working on is as boring as the lifelessness of one's breath on a dull day.

That is on the worst, and there is nothing mysterious about such mornings, afternoons, or nights, unless it is the sense that destiny never guarantees a happy end (unless you are Napoleon and—we know!--he was wrong!) You are brought up close, on such occasions, to the future rigor of an unhappy denouement for yourself.

But then there are also the odd, off-beat, happy days when something does happen as you write and one's characters take surprising turns, sometimes revealing themselves to you by their words appearing on the page in a manner other than you expected them to be. You discover that you know more about life and your characters than you thought you did. Such days are glorious. And they are certainly spooky.

Nor are any two days of good work necessarily the same. One may be practical and effective on certain mornings and the skill is actually in the sobriety of the effort. On another kind of hour, one takes risks. Yet if you have gotten good enough over the years (after decades of such varied mornings), there is also the sense of a governing hand (not necessarily and altogether your own) that keeps the highs and the lows from dashing away from one another so outrageously that one's novel changes from chapter to chapter. (That is as bad as a car that pops out of its gear-shift at the damndest times.)

All right. The point of this introduction has been made. Possibly it has been made. In any event, I, as the author of this work, have succeeded in justifying the title to myself.

Let me continue, however, with a warning to the reader. We have here a book which will tell you a good deal of what I know about the problems of writing and, more than occasionally, they are advanced problems. But it is not a how-to-do-it for most beginners who want the basic approaches to plot, dialogue, suspense and marketing of manuscripts carefully and well laid-out. This is, rather, a book for men and women who have already found some vocation to write in college or graduate schools, have perhaps taken courses on novel technique, advanced students and loose cannons who have begun to encounter the subtle perils and hazards of the writer's life. Indeed, I can even promise that there will even be a few sparse thoughts included on the values and vices of heavy drinking and marijuana.

Let me give, however, a second warning which concerns me more. The Spooky Art by the nature of its composition as an assemblage of remarks, pieces, essays, and squibs, is without stylistic unity. The manner shifts at times from page to page. Given its components, there was no way to avoid this. The most characteristic single aspect in the daily life of a writer is that his stimulations derive from a host of various sources, some pedestrian, others of reasonable elevation. Off-the-cuff remarks in an interview even when polished a degree for syntax, can hardly be the equal of an essay done at the top of one's form. Yet the inner life of a young writer is filled with just such a spectrum of harsh perceptions roughly stated and insights good enough to startle even one's best perception of oneself.

I decided then—so be it for this book. The reader will be jolted about from time to time and for that I apologize. Some may even refuse to treat this as a work of printed pages so much as an unexpected and possibly dubious gift of chocolates into which they can dip and move on, pleasure mixed with displeasure. I cannot pretend to say this is wrong. I have tried to put some separate elements together with as much order as is possible under these curious circumstances—close to fifty years of reflecting, meditating, musing and declaring my thoughts on a profession I practised and could not always feel I understood—but to those readers for whom order in style is one of the cardinal literary virtues (and I am one of them) there may be no other way to treat this volume than as a gift of occasionally exceptional sweetmeats and disappointments. (Not every title and subtitle will deliver its promise.)

All the same, I also have a few hopes that the order imposed on these fifty years of separate opinions and conclusions will be read by some from the first page to the last, and a few readers, determined to be major writers, will find The Spooky Art to be an intimate handbook they can return to over the decades of their careers.

We may as well begin with a bit of comment on my literary childhood, such as it was. In 1963, Steve Marcus did an interview with me for Paris Review, and I have taken the liberty of separating his careful and elegant set of questions into several parts in order to give a bit of structure to my first years as a writer. For those who are more interested in what I have to say about writing in general rather than myself and particular, you are invited to skip over these first autobiographical details and move on to what I have to say about The Naked and the Dead, Barbary Shore and The Deer Park. Or, if you are in search of more useful nitty-gritty, move even further along in Lit Biz to "The Last Draft of The Deer Park" or, following it, "Hazards."

MARCUS I

Interviewer: Do you need any particular environment in which to write?

Mailer: I like a room with a view, preferably a long view. I like looking at the sea, or ships, or

In the course of forty years of doing interviews, I've talked and thought and written about such problems facing the novelist as plot, character, style, third person, first person, the psychology of the writer, the philosophical implications of the novel, the search for good habits of work, and the changes seen over fifty years in publishing. On more than one occasion, I have given assessments—usually on the fly—of fellow novelists, alive and dead. I have thought a fair bit about the need for stamina in doing a novel, and the relation of this stamina to one's style. Occasionally, I have even worked and therefore lived with the differences and similarities between fiction and non-fiction, fiction and journalism, and thought about the life of action and the life of meditation as it affects one's work. I have talked and written about the pitfalls of early success, and coping with disastrous reviews. I have dealt with memoir versus autobiography, and the competitive spirit of the novelist, about identity and identity crisis; about the occult in relation to the novelist, about renewing one's desire to write, and such strategies as when it is wise for the writer to enter a character's mind, and when and when not to make characters out of real people.

These numerous subjects revolve around the act of writing fiction. Excerpts from those forty years of interviews were revised until they obtained minimal clarity of meaning and a firming of syntax that was not always present in the more casual back-and-forth of the interview. The author has also chosen illustrative material from some of his prefaces and pieces of criticism that bear directly on these subjects. The result is a volume able to

appeal to serious writers and to people who wish to write, to students, to critics, to men and women who love to read and so will be ready to enjoy what is here since Mailer is at his most candid in these observations and evaluations. Most of all, this is a book for young novelists who wish to improve their skills and their commitment to the subtle difficulties and uncharted mysteries of serious novel writing itself. Among the authors discussed, some in reasonable depth, others in passing comment, are Hemingway, Faulkner, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Updike, Cheever, Roth, Doctorow, Capote, Vidal, Bellow, Heller, James Jones, Styron, Cheever, James T. Farrell, Henry Adams, Henry James, Garcia Marquez, Melville, Proust, Graham Greene, Scott Fitzgerald, Nelson Algren, Kurt Vonnegut, Dwight MacDonald, Toni Morrison, Thomas Wolfe, Tom Wolfe, Jean Malaquais, Don DeLillo, Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Christopher Isherwood, Mary McCarthy, J.D. Salinger, William Kennedy, Kate Millett, Ralph Ellison, John Dos Passos, D.H. Lawrence, Mark Twain, Freud and Marx. Even Bill Buckley is mentioned. (In relation to character versus plot.)

Let it be explained that most of this material is either uncollected or long out-of-print. More formal essays on Mark Twain, D.H. Lawrence, Mary McCarthy, and Tom Wolfe's last book are included, but they amount to no more than a fraction of the pages in the collection. The rest cannot be obtained without grubbing through old magazines and out-of-print book catalogues. Here, without dust, is then a collection of literary gleanings, aperçus, fulminations, pensees, gripes, insights, regrets, affirmations, a few excuses, several insults, and a cornucopia of perceptions whose worth critics are bound to debate in time to come

It is interesting that my formal sense intensifies as I grow older and so I have looked to assemble this book in time to come out on January 31, 2003. I will be exactly eighty years old on that occasion.

Television has destroyed that to a huge degree. It has cut the attention span of children. By now, to most people in America, a narrative is something that doesn't go on for too long—usually, it is cut short at seven minutes. It can remain intact as long as twelve minutes before a new commercial comes on. And in that manner are our emotions deadened. The need for quick injections of amusement or wit becomes paramount. Aesthetics becomes one-liners.

WRITING NOVELS

As for the title, a good deal of hesitation went into the adjective. Spooky is virtually a child's word and seemed too casual. Besides, it does not always apply. Not all days at one's desk are odd or subtly frightening, or, for that matter, full of scary fun. Novel writing can also be dogged. There are unproductive hours that feel like nothing so much as the act of trying to start an old car when the motor has gone dead on you.

Nor is that a geriatric analogy. It is usually young men who have old cars. Moreover, there is no sense of youth that a young man can feel on a truly bad day of writing. (Only the old can be aware of the true abyss of inexperience. Young novelists do get to feel like old men on such unhappy occasions as if whatever talent they once possessed is now gone. Nevermore! The first intimations of old age for many a young novelist is the day when the gift does not appear, or, comes through hobbled. Scenes that one expected to be rich are without life on the page. One's inner life, that exceptional sense of oneself as possessed of an inner life that is not like others—is absent. The scene one is working on is as boring as the lifelessness of one's breath on a dull day.

That is on the worst, and there is nothing mysterious about such mornings, afternoons, or nights, unless it is the sense that destiny never guarantees a happy end (unless you are Napoleon and—we know!--he was wrong!) You are brought up close, on such occasions, to the future rigor of an unhappy denouement for yourself.

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