



PSYCHOLOGY

67.16 Some books come to you as gifts. As The Naked and the Dead came to me. You do not have to work some part of your being into exhaustion in order to dredge them up. What I say next introduces a fatal shade of the mystical, but it is almost as if you are serving as agent or servant for a book that wants to get itself written. So an author never knows what to think of such work when he is done. His real fondness—since writing books is the closest men ever get to childbearing—is more for those works which he delivered out of his own flesh, torn and deadened by the process, but able at least to use all art and craft, all accumulated lore..

70.1 The reason why just about every farmer alive, every redneck, instinctively distrusts the Jew is because we Jews tend to be intellectual machines, people born to try to dominate life with their minds. I grew up in that tradition. And I had a mind, when I was younger, which was like an intellectual machine. It wasn't that good a machine. In comparison with the best, it was second rate. But it was certainly a machine. It had the habit of looking to dominate every experience it encountered. This went on for years. And, of course, I was obsessed with sex because that was an experience that you could not dominate. You had to approach it with an unstable mix of low lust and veneration. Going to a bullfighting was another experience I couldn't dominate with my mind. It took me about three or four fights to get to like it at all, but once I did, it was a passion. I lived with bullfights in Mexico over several summers. I had encountered something that was larger than my mind. Boxing came later and was easier to comprehend because of its limitations. Boxers, to a degree, can dominate an opponent with their minds, whereas you can rarely dominate a street fight. The greatest professional fight is probably not as great a spectacle as a great street fight. Because of the terror of the participants and of the audience. What do you do if it gets wholly out of control?

82.14 Writing can also be a way of using up a large and uncomfortable presence in yourself. It's supposed to be famously known, for instance, that pornographers end up impotent. That's probably a myth with a certain amount of predictability. If you work a muscle hard, it tends to develop; overworked, it can break down. I think something of the same is true of imagination. Force it too far and it can cease to return anything. We write novels out of two impulses. One is to understand ourselves better, and the other is to present what we know about others. Of course, it is often impossible to comprehend others until one has plumbed the bottom of certain preoccupations about oneself.

Lit Biz?

82.14 Today, most of my ideas today are less involved with new exploration than with occupying thematic territories I reconnoitered years ago. If you no longer have the pleasure of enjoying your mind in the way you used to when young, you do have the knowledge of previous years to work with. In 1972, while interviewing Henry Kissinger, I asked him if he enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of his White House work, and he said in effect, "I am working with ideas I formed at Harvard years ago. I haven't had a real idea since I've been on this; I just work with the old ones." By now, I know what he meant—there are just so many new ideas you can have. There comes a time in your life when you want to implement them.

write
with
Sally
on unconscious
or
drop

83.10 I've always had the feeling that it doesn't make much sense to write about something if others can do it as well. As an instance, I never felt my childhood was so unique to me that it was worth recording. On the other hand, I conceal, sometimes, from myself what is there to write about myself. It can be wasteful to know that you have something to say on a subject; for you can plunge in before you're ready to give your full commitment.

This may sound odd to people who do not write. After all, I do picture the unconscious as a not wholly developed area where all sorts of political, emotional, creative, and military campaigns go on. That's probably the best metaphor for the unconscious that I have. Over and over again, I discover that my unconscious will disclose to me what it chooses, but only when it chooses. When I am working on a long book, for instance, I almost never think about it when not working. I've come to recognize that it's highly impractical to contemplate one's work when not at the work table. I happen to have a memory that's psychopathic in its halflife. I forget half of everything I am thinking in about four seconds unless I write it down.

work
into
Subfold myself
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Lrt Biz

83.10 It may be that part of the ability to remain a writer is to learn how to protect your ego over the years. One does ring oneself around with ego-protections. The price, of course, is that inspiration does blow the door open less often. Still, you do carry out your projects.

83.10 If I had tried to write all of Ancient Evenings in one year, my ignorance of the subject would have pressed upon me so powerfully, it couldn't have been done. Over the course of ten years, however, you can carry the fear. What the hell, there is always fear in writing a book. That is why there are many more people who can write well than do. And, of course, some people can't take the meanness of the occupation. There's nothing very attractive about going into a room by yourself every day and looking at a piece of paper and making calligraphic marks on it. Doing that year after year, decade after decade, punishes you through the very monotony of the physical process. The act of writing itself, taken as a physical act, is less interesting, for example, than painting where more of your body is exercised in the act.

Like all occupations, writing also presents its unique elements of risk. In the case of the novelist, it is to his ego. You really don't want to get into a book where you are not taking some risk, especially a long book. You can do a book quickly in two months, six months, or a year when the risks are minimal. But for a long work, you would, and should, take risks. How not? How dignify the time it takes if large risks aren't engaged?

88.1 Nobody knows how much damage writing a novel does to you except another writer. It's hell; you can poison your body. It's an unnatural activity to sit at a desk and squeeze words out of yourself. Various kinds of fatigues and poisons get secreted through your system and you don't get rid of them easily. As you age, it grows worse. I believe that is one of the reasons I've been so interested in prize fighters. I think often of the aging boxer who has to get into shape for one more fight and knows the damage it will do to his body. Since that integument has already begun to slow up, it puts him in gloom. One of the things that characterizes almost every older fighter I've seen training for a fight is the depression that hangs over him and his camp. For the only good thing likely to come out of it will be money. The rest is close to a foregone conclusion. Even if he wins the fight—even if he wins it well—he's not going to get a new purchase on life out of the eclat of his success in the way he did as a young fighter. That's also true in my profession. Writers will often make grave decisions—am I going to attempt this difficult book or not? At a certain point, you must believe that the work will be enormously important. Or else, why suffer the kind of slow self-destruction it will entail? Writing a novel over two or three years of the hardest work sometimes does the kind of damage to the body that is equal to obliging someone who has never smoked before to consume two or three packs a day over a few years. I think one reason I've always been such an interested amateur about medicine is because when you are a writer, you are, in a certain sense, doctor to yourself. You can always feel tensions and ailments creeping into you. It goes with the

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territory. Your factory is yourself. You are always examining the factory for potential breakdowns, anticipating troubles, and so you get to be awfully alert to the relation not only between yourself and other people but between yourself and your body. Writing impinges on that body, writing depends ultimately on that body. Proust, with his asthma, was like an important industrialist who manages to get out an extraordinarily consistent product even if one wing of the factory is notoriously subject to breakdown.

81.16 The men and women I felt closest to when I was young, the Marxists, were caught in the insoluble knot of trying to explain every deviation from Marxist prediction. As we all know now, it became a comedy. Interpretations within interpretations. Nonetheless, I respected Marxists more than psychoanalysts whom I considered to be a bunch of plumbers. They were fairly good at dealing with psyches badly in need of relief of pressure here, or a bad leak fixed there, but they were hopeless when it came to understanding the place where the psyche met the spirit in no-man's-land and ultimate distinctions blurred--the average Freudian believes that there is something obscene about religion. Dubious at best, psychotic at worst. They couldn't and wouldn't admit it, but those were ^{the} ~~their~~ deepest sentiments, in the majority of them back in the Fifties and Sixties. At the highest intellectual level of which I was capable then, the Marxists were useless, the psychoanalysts were useless, and the corporatists in my own country were worse than useless. They were expanding and they were spiritually exploitative. By the end of the Fifties, I knew that I was on my own. I would have to chart my own intellectual world. This thought was more intoxicating than fearsome.

Youth! Ole!

I like it less
than at first glance
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During sports events and political conventions, the reporters all get together in the evening to exchange stories. You give away the stories that you know your paper won't print and in return, you get the stories that their newspaper or magazine is not interested in. In this media marketplace, everybody winds up using everybody else's stories. What is worse, however, is that everybody arrives at the same interpretation. To wit, Jack Kennedy is a lightweight, Nelson Rockefeller is a wonderful guy---whatever the interpretation is for that week comes out as gospel. Their political wisdom was often nil, a consensus of this journalistic marketplace. Possessing the confidence of a novelist, it's easy to take the large step of thinking that, yes, the way in which I see this event is likely to be more right than the way they are seeing it. You can go a long way on that confidence. It's banal to make the remark that all you have to do is look at what is going on, but the trick is to be able to look. That is not easy for the average journalist whose vision is often stunted by the *steady pressure* of the unrelenting demands and limitations of his job.

81.16 I don't know why I started writing about Egypt. I've been laboring on Ancient Evenings off and on for ten years. Only now do I feel as if I'm beginning to understand the Egypt of antiquity, but then you can often write well about matters that you don't understand, provided you don't aspire to faking knowledge you don't have. On the other hand, most of my life I've explored fictional subjects in advance of my understanding. Often, years later, somewhat wiser, I would look over something done years before and be amazed that I could have written it at all. Oddly enough, now that I have the knowledge, I probably wouldn't feel the need to do that book. There's a potentiality in all of us that can only be tapped by writing. Sometimes I think the only way you can be sure you are attracted to a new subject, is that you know so little about it, and yet are so drawn toward it. Perhaps you possess one deep instinct into the subject--a special kind of purchase which will accelerate your comprehension as you proceed. It's more fun, for example, to pick up a mystery novel and read it if, early in that book, you decide that you do have a clue to who did it which the average reader doesn't have, a feeling that you and the author share something. In that happy condition, you are going to get more out of reading such a book than others. I think something of that ilk often occurs in happy historical research. Reading about ancient Egypt, I felt I knew more about burial customs than the average Egyptologist. Not more about the details, which I hadn't learned as yet, but more about the underlying reason for some of the practices. That was enough of a special purchase to wish to pursue it a long way further on.

81.2 I've found that I can't do serious writing without getting into a mild depression. It is a vital part of the process because, to begin with, it's perilous to fall in love with what you're doing. You lose your judgment. And for the simplest reason—the words, as you are writing them, stir your feelings too much. Odds are, if they stir you that disproportionately, they will excite no one else. And then, you can also be depressed for totally different reasons not at all simple to explain. The deeper your theme, and the more material you are using to support it, the more you may be exhausting the possibilities of other themes that are related to it. So, gloom descends. Certain things won't get written about after all. No book I wrote put me into a more profound depression while doing it than The Armies of the Night.

81.2 The society of the literary world is a dangerous place to inhabit if you want to get serious work done. In that world, it's almost necessary to take on airs in order to protect yourself. And the airs have to be finely tuned if they are to do the job. Capote has a wonderful set and walks around like a little fortress—at least until lately. Hemingway committed suicide working on his airs. He took the literary world much too seriously. His death is there now as a lesson to the rest of us: Don't get involved in the literary world at too deep a level or it will kill you and--pure Hemingway-- it will kill you for the silliest reasons: for vanity, or because feuds are beginning to etch your liver with the acids of frustration. Hemingway did his best to eschew much of the literary world, but he established a fief with his airs and a royal court of followers. He may have worked as hard on that as on his books. I would repeat: it killed him.

81.2 The energy I put into my public, performing self probably helped my mind and hurt my work. I think it gave me an understanding of the complexity of the world that I would not have had if I'd stayed at home. I would have tended then to have a much more paranoid vision of how sinister things are. Things are sinister, but not in the way I used to think. That is one of the inner tests of the acumen of the writer. How subtle, how full of nuance, how original is his or her sense of the sinister?

81.26 Hemingway occupies the very center of writing itself. Anyone who's ever read a newspaper can feel how good a writer he is—he uses a vocabulary that if anything is smaller than the average newspaperman's available choices. And he does wonderful things with that verbal economy. No matter how serious or superficial a reader you are, you quickly sense that you are in the hands of someone who writes so well that your wits are keyed afterward to the flaws in bad writing.

82.16 Some writers have a powerful sense of identity. I think the best American examples might be Henry Miller, Hemingway, Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe. And let us not forget Henry James. Or, Sinclair Lewis! Then you get to people like Steinbeck who kept changing his persona with every book he did. As other good examples of this second category, I could add myself or Ed Doctorow. Picasso comes even more to mind. His many changes of style are generally seen as a reaction to the different women in his life. I could say the same about myself. Up to a point. I suppose I've written a different book with every wife but then I think you become a different man in each marriage. On the other hand, Henry Miller married a number of times and that did not change his identity. I suppose the crucial difference is that some people are born with clear roots. They know exactly where they came from and who they are and what they are, but the world outside these roots can be opaque to them. I've been the opposite—forever in the course of discovering who I am and what I am, whereas someone like Miller had to establish his identity very early in life. I expect this is true for people who grow up in hostile families—they must arrive at an identity sooner, a hard, often hostile identity that the parents cannot mess with too easily. Miller's loves and hates remain fairly constant through his career.

82.16 I'm always a little uneasy when my writing comes without much effort. It seems better to have to forge the will to work on a given day. I find that on such occasions, if I do succeed in writing against resistance in myself, even finishing in a bad mood, the result is often good. (As I discover days or weeks later. The Armies of the Night, for example, was written in a towering depression.) I did it in two months and piled up some of the worst weeks of my life, blues, gloom, ~~and catatonia~~ ^{world class}. After all, I was writing about myself in the third person. While it seemed interesting up to a point to speak of a protagonist named Norman Mailer, it was, on the other hand, damned odd. I was halfway into the book before I got used to it. It is a very funny way to look at oneself. Yet, by the time I was done I missed the character of Norman Mailer so much that I brought him back for book after book. It never worked as well again. The commitment has to be there. In The Armies of the Night I was a true protagonist of the best sort--half-heroic, three-quarters comic.

73.14 Usually, on an average working day, you try to raise yourself to a level where you can pick up your story again. You have to pass through a peculiar hour or two, get yourself in shape to do the writing. That means you have to face yourself each morning. While everyone does exactly that one way or another on most mornings, the difference is that the writer must do it alone, day after day after day, a matter of brooding and drifting, and possibly getting into what's bothering you, or even just unwinding a little. Since you are ready as a novelist to sit in judgment on others, however, you are obliged to look sooner or later each morning on everything in yourself that's weak or second rate and relevant as of this morning.

73.14 What I write is more important to me than myself. I think Hemingway got into trouble because he could never get that balance clear in his mind. Finally, he had to be as important as the work. Thereby, he was engaging in the hardest thing you can do. It became an enormous demand for him. There could never be a character in his books who was braver than himself. It's a beautiful demand, and there's a beautiful rigor in forcing oneself to submit to such a code, but it does cut down on the amount of work you can do. While it's legitimate to write about a man who's braver than yourself, it's better to recognize him quickly as such. As a novelist, I would like to believe I could put a heavyweight champion of the world into a novel, and make him convincing, even enter his mind without having to be the best fifty-year old fighter-writer around.

71.7 When I'm writing, I am rarely in a good mood. A part of me prefers to work in a flat depression. Day after day, I see hardly anyone. I'll put in eight or ten hours, of which only three or four will consist of words being put on the page. It's almost a question of one's own metabolism. You begin, after all, from a standing start and have to accelerate up to a level of cerebration where the best words are coming— in good order. Just as a fighter has to feel that he possesses the right to do physical damage to another man, so a writer has to be ready to take chances with his readers' lives. If you're trying for something at all interesting or difficult then you cannot predict what the results of your work will be. If it's close enough to the root, people can be psychically injured reading you. Full of heart, he was also heartless--a splendid oxymoron. That can be the epitaph for many a good novelist.

68.1 I learned how to accept and live with my legend. It became my friend, a beard, a front man, a pimp, a procurer of new situations. The legend is a ghost who is more real to other people than to yourself. In time, every single action you take with another person becomes part of a triangle. Every woman you talk to is not only in love with you or disappointed in you but is also attracted to your legend—who (how could it be otherwise?) is more real to her than you are. There are times, therefore, when you beef up your legend, perform some action to support it; times when you draw credit back from your legend, like accepting the desire of some stranger to do something nice for you. Either way, you don't pretend—as I did for years—that the legend isn't really there; it is.

85.15 Few good writers come out of prison. Incarceration, I think, can destroy a man's ability to write. The noise in prison is tremendous. Plus the paranoia—you do have to be afraid of or distrust many of the people around you. The tension of past events is always there—you hassled someone three weeks ago when you were feeling strong; now, you are feeling weak. That guy is working out with weights; every day in the yard, you get his bad looks. Then, there is the daily injustice, which is inevitable. The guards who have a hardon for you. Most convicts may not have a very good sense of the rights due others, but they have a close-to-absolute sense of what's due them. They're not getting their rights most of the time. And injustice breeds obsession. Obsession blots out the power to write. Obsession, after all, is like a magnetic field. You keep being pulled back into a direction you have not chosen. All this militates against writing well. Given the incredible experience of prison, you'd think that writers would ferment like a yeast, but they don't. Only the best survive to be able to write once they get out.

Lennon/1999 A prevailing notion: "Mailer may be a good writer, but he is such an egomaniac." Many never read me for that reason and it's not entirely without justice. When people have a large driving ego, as I certainly did for many years, it takes them over. They begin to see everything in terms of their own status. If they're rejected, they fight back. Muhammad Ali is the foremost example of that. He began as the leading American egomaniac, and people couldn't bear him because there is, indeed, something implacable about someone who's all ego. The remarkable thing with Ali is that through the years, and through his deeds--of course, those deeds were heroic--the public has come to love him. In the lens of public estimation, he has changed from an egomaniac to a saint. Now, I'm no candidate for the latter, but I will say that once you've worked through the huge fever of a galloping ego, what you develop, and it's one of the virtues of living through your vices rather than repressing them, is that you tend to have a larger objectivity than when you started. Ego gave me the desire to write about a great many things, objectivity showed me subtle ways to go at it.

Lennon/1999 Most writers go through a long, arduous preparation before they arrive. William Kennedy, for example, worked in the boondocks for 20 years before it was recognized what a talented writer he is. By the time he achieved his successes, he could enjoy them. He had earned them. He knew the man he was when his success arrived. There were fewer shocks and surprises. For me, it was exactly the opposite. It took 20 years to come to terms with who I was and to recognize that my experience was the only experience I was going to have. A few other literary people have also been shot out of a cannon—James Jones, for example. But Jones went through more than I did before he wrote *From Here to Eternity*. By the time he'd arrived, he was much more ready to enjoy the success. I was a great pain in the ass to a great many people because I'd keep saying, "Oh, woe is me. I will never have the experience of other people. I will have nothing to write about." Jones didn't give a damn. He knew he had killed the lion and now he wanted to eat it.

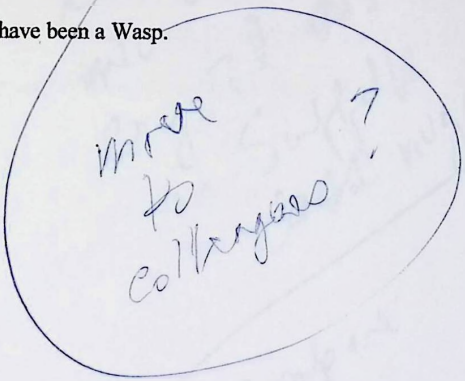
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83.35 Novelists must write almost every day, at regular times and places, in order to encourage the unconscious to be ready to tap what are often long-buried associations. If you fail to show up in the morning after you promised yourself you would just before you went to sleep last night, then you will walk around with ants in your brain.

Inop-
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83.20 The unconscious can lead one to interesting places. In Ancient Evenings I named my narrator Menenhetet, and made it Meni for short. A couple of years later I came across a translated text of an inscription on an ancient Egyptian temple wall which described the battle of Kadesh, a key event in the novel. In this inscription was mentioned one Menni, Ramses the Second's equerry, which was exactly Meni's role in that part of the book. Somehow, I didn't even think of the coincidence as spooky. Confirmative, rather, as if it proved that there was some damn reason I was giving myself to the tome.

83.13 I put everything I knew about life into The Naked and the Dead. I had to start over for the next. Each of my early books was seen by me as a weapon in the face of the enemy, whoever the enemy was at the time. It's only in recent years that I've begun to consider pacing myself and having a literary career. I've been thinking about John Updike in the past few months because his history is the exact opposite of mine. If ever there was a career where a man knew he had a fine talent and had to protect it and work at it carefully, his is it. I think one of the reasons for his popularity now is because he's a lonely example of someone who nurtured his skills. In this time of immense distraction, anyone who can truly exercise craft is to be admired. But Updike doesn't make me feel that I've lived the wrong life, that I should have stayed married to one woman, so to speak. That would be like saying I should have been a Wasp.



more
to
colleagues?

92.1 Certain novelists want to keep within the boundaries of their experience. It is sensible. But what intrigues me are the matters most guarded, most secret, most unavailable to me. My own key experiences are exactly what I will not use directly. They can instead form crystals in the mind and the heart. Then, I can shine a light through. I find one story if the light points in a given direction, and another from a different angle. That is why I have wanted to do books that take me out to alien landscapes, places where I can use the light of the crystal to give odd and powerful insights to semi-strange matters.

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91.3 John Cheever was far and away our finest short-story writer. Better even, I'd say, than John O'Hara. But I never knew him except casually. We didn't get along. We saw each other as belonging to the enemy camp, whatever that is. We never quite defined that enemy camp. After he died, I read his collected stories and thought they were wonderful. So I felt woe: "One more writer gone that I never really did talk to." And the reason is that I've always had a feeling that it's not a good idea to be close friends with another writer. Because you can end up talking away your books. And you can get into awful relationships where, indeed, a little part of you dies when the other has success. Part of living, part of becoming a wise man or a wise woman, is to get to that point where you can have a friend for whom you are genuinely happy when he or she has a success. That's tough. Not everybody gets to that point. With writers, it's next to impossible. You can't really bless a novelist who's as good as yourself. If you can, you're too saintly to be a writer.

91.3 Truman Capote was wonderful when all was said. When you think of that tiny man who lived through his early years with the public laughing at him. To spend his youth a pampered little darling with a few friends who catered to him egregiously, yet nonetheless having the balls, the enormous balls, to decide he was going to be a major figure in American life. The hell with writing. He was going to give up writing in order to be a major social figure, and in doing this I think he sacrificed the last ten or twenty years of his talent.

91.10 I've been obsessed with questions of identity all my life. Mine was forcibly changed at the age of 25. I went from being unknown, to being a public figure in a few months, and I've been living with it ever since. Ergo, I've always been fascinated with spies and actors and men or women who take on roles that are not their own, especially if they live in the role even more than they might like. I wouldn't say actors are equal to spies, but they have the experience of living a false life that can become more real than their own life. The few times I've acted, I've been amazed at how alive you can feel. Sometimes more real than in your own life. When a spy feels friendship for someone they're going to betray, the friendship is still real. The average journalist is, in that way, a spy.

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98.11 When writing The Executioner's Song I used to work eight and ten hours a day, six days a week. But on other books, when I'm doing something that is coming more from my imagination, I only work a couple of hours. Imaginative work uses you up much more rapidly each day. But no matter how I work, there is one rule I try never to break. If I tell myself I am going to work tomorrow, no matter how I feel next morning I will get up and go to my desk. What I have learned over the years is that you've got to respect your unconscious. It lives a virtually separate existence from you. It does much of the work for you in your sleep. If you have made a date with it, then you had better show in the morning. If not, the unconscious can get unruly. Its troops have been left standing in the rain. So whenever I am talking to a writing class, and they ask for advice, I tell them this. I say it is the only rule in writing that I would offer to everyone.

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98.17 If you start a novel before you're ready, it's exactly as if you are a young athlete out in a game with professionals who are far beyond you. Not ready, you get clobbered. One does well to build up a little literary experience before embarking on a long piece of work. On the other hand, if one can take the likelihood of ending in failure, a young writer can learn a good deal by daring to embark on the long voyage that is a novel.

McKay/2000 I'd written the book, but I had absolutely no idea what it was like to be a success. Before The Naked and the Dead was published, I thought maybe I could make a success of writing, maybe I couldn't. Then came its huge success. It was number one on the bestseller list for many weeks and I was a celebrity. It was absolutely unthinkable. I made the remark that I felt as if I were secretary to someone named Norman Mailer, and to meet him, people had to meet me first. It took a long time to realize that fame and celebrity, which unhorsed me in the beginning, eventually became an acquired appetite. As the Marquis De Sade once said, "There's no pleasure greater than that obtained from a conquered repugnance." I began to want more and more of it. Fame makes you realize that you are cut off from normal life—people don't look at you in the same way—but it does give a sense of how delicate and changeable is identity. And so my experience finally became interesting to me. I could now write about the identity of people who had gained a certain amount of power, and had to put up, therefore, with a new identity

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Foreman/2001 When people suffer an identity crisis, they generally have to take all sorts of curious steps to locate who they are. They succeed here, they fail there and that gives them points of reference. So I had to have a public life even though I was particularly shy in those years. Half shy and half arrogant, like most young writers. I discovered, however, that I had gregarious gifts and started to employ them. Before long, I began to enjoy them. I also wasted a lot living that way. You gain, you lose, and it makes for a new kind of life. And eventually for a new identity.

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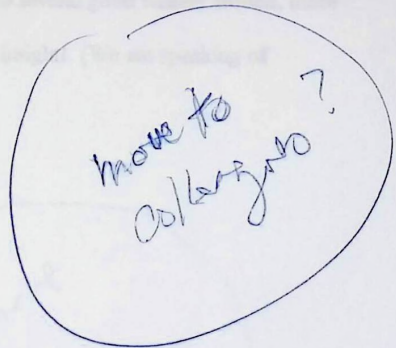
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Recommend
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Lee/2001 The few times in my life that I've been associated with real violence stay with me and remain a source for writing. I have a theory concerning crucial experiences that I've expressed from time to time, but it might be worth stating it again. I think that we go through certain events that I speak of as crystals. They are the ones you shouldn't write about. They are too special, too intense, too concentrated. For instance, I've never written about my childhood. Too many crystals there. You can beam your imagination through a crystal in one direction and end up with an extrapolation of the original events. From another direction, you get another scenario from the same crystal. So you guard the crystal because it embodies so many different possibilities so long as you don't use it up directly by transmogrifying it into words.

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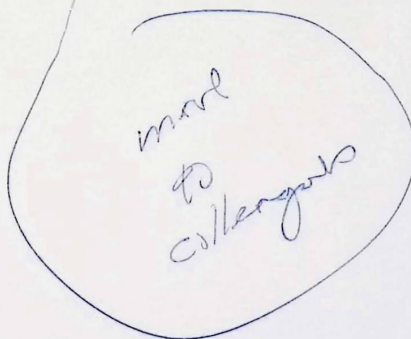
Hughes/2001 At one point Salinger received two hideous reviews, one from Mary McCarthy and one from me. That one-two punch took, I think, a lot out of him. Salinger is an example of a writer who was immensely spoiled and tremendously received. Adored. I think there were hordes of the young who would have walked off a cliff for him. He was needed. It was a bad time; it was the Fifties. He could have served. It was tough on the young that he disappeared then, just as a decade later, Hemingway's suicide was tough on a lot of us. We revered Hemingway, and Papa had gone and blown his brains out. Part of the obligation on a writer is to stick around. It's amazing how iconic we are to certain people.



[Coll]

95.47 When James Jones was writing Some Came Running, we were all waiting for that book. "What if it's fabulous? Two major novels in a row! Then, where are we?" When it came out and wasn't all that good (at any rate, it was not nearly so good as From Here to Eternity), we all felt a great relief. But I was also angry at myself for feeling glee. I knew that if Jones had done something incredible, it would have pushed me to try for more. Jones and I used to feel, for a certain period in the early fifties, that we were the two best writers around, the gold-dust twins. Unspoken was the feeling that there was room for only one of us. I remember that Jones inscribed a copy of From Here to Eternity: "For Norman, my dearest enemy, my most feared friend."

Actually, we were both wrong. When there are several good writers around, more and more exciting work can emerge. An astonishing insight! (We are speaking of nothing less than an artists' movement.)

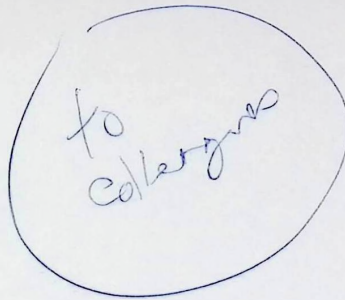


[Coll]

95.47 Picasso had a bleak, dark, ugly view of woman. But on the other hand, he had the same view of himself. If you can pass though Picasso and still have a little love left for humanity, then you have arrived at some kind of peace. Picasso is like a doctor and who's cleaning out a very ugly wound, the filth embedded in humanity.

[Coll]

Frost/1992 Henry Miller was wonderful in person. He'd always tell you the truth. But tell it in the gentlest way he could. Look at the contrast to his writing. It's the guys who pen wonderfully sweet books who are monsters. You know, they kick the wife, cuff the kids, and have the dog shrinking in horror. Then their books come out: "X once again delights the reader with his sense of joy." Miller kept his goodness for the people he encountered.



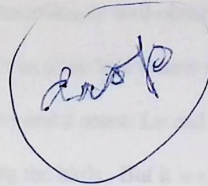
[World]

91.37 During the seven years I worked on Harlot's Ghost I perceived the CIA and its agents as people of high morals and thorough deceit, loyalty and duplicity, passion and ice-cold detachment. So many writers, including myself, have much of that in their makeup. It's what makes us novelists, even as intelligence agents are drawn to their profession by the striking opposites in their nature.

91.23 My body never prospers when I am writing. It puts stress and tension into all your systems. What is easier now, however, is that there are fewer distractions. One of the hardest things about being a young writer is that every day you spend writing is the day you don't meet this fabulous woman who will be the best heroine in American fiction--at least in your willing hands. Now, I'm happily removed from all that. Work used to be the great stone you carried on your back. Today, it's the opposite. I can't quite carry the analogy out to say that the stone has become a lighter-than-air balloon, but, I confess, work now nourishes me.

drop
said father
on p. 8

91.18 During the seven years it took to do Harlot's Ghost, I often felt as if I was going through a cave, following a thread. I wasn't certain who had put the thread there. But you keep holding it. That's all you've got. It proved to be a good thread. I never felt, "I can't go on."



[World]

Vitka/1984 A young writer, if he is unknown, can be at a party and watch what everyone is doing. If he has a marvelous ear for dialogue, he can wake up the next morning and remember all that was said and how it was said. He is a bird on a branch. Sees like a bird and writes books that are extraordinarily well-observed. But once you are successful, especially if it happens quickly, it's as if the bird is now an emu, and wingless. It's big and grows haunches and fore-shoulders and a mane: Lo and behold, it is a lion. And everyone is looking at the lion, including the birds. But it is a lion with the heart of a bird and the mind of a bird. So there is a terrible period when the ex-emu is trying to live as a lion and has small gifts for it. Then the beast begins to experiment: when it runs, it now sees other animals scamper. It takes a while—five, ten years—to get to appreciate your effect on others, and longer to begin to understand all over again what makes them tick. In the old days, you understood people by induction; now, by deduction. Of course, you do have more material on which to work those deductions.

84.29 A good novelist has got to be very brave on the one hand, and prudent on the other. So, writers are a delicate species. More sensitive than others in the beginning, they have to develop the will, the stamina, the determination, and the insensitivity to take critical abuse. A good writer, therefore, is an oxymoron--a strong, weak person, full of brave timidity, sensitive and insensitive. Novelists have to have an exceptional ear for how people speak, and know how they think, but must be near to impervious to people or they will never get the work done.

[Aud]

83.22 There's a marvelous irony that's in the very warp and woof of fabricating an alternate self. When I wrote Advertisements for Myself, I realized that one could literally forge one's career by the idea you instilled of yourself in others. That is, impersonate the person you'd like to be and have some reasonable chance of becoming in a couple of years, and soon enough, you are lifting yourself by your bootstraps. It is an unbelievably demanding task—as profound a game as a criminal lawyer plays by cutting himself off forever, perhaps, from any clear notion of what his own morality might be. The negative side, however, is that you then end up with this incredible dinosaur's tail of legend, and it's false legend—it never worked even on the day it was created. Twenty years later, you're still using your best efforts to drag the tail around. One relief to getting older is that I no longer have to square my shoulders every time I go into a bar.