

UNDER SONORAN SKIES, PROSE AND POETRY FROM THE HIGH DESERT

CHAPTER XI. CRAFTING THE VISION

I act, therefore I am observed to be.

I speak, so I am perceived.

I dream, therefore, I am.

I write, so I continue to exist.

Susan Cosby-Patton

Cowboy Poetry Spoken Here

Bill Black

So folks will know what you're doing, you really need a sign
So I figured I'd make up one, calling out my poetry line.

It said "Cowboy Poetry Spoken Here," fitting to a tee
And folks can plainly see this sign and poet – namely me.

Well one old pard happened by and, like all pards do,
He reckoned he'd help improve my sign with his opinions too.

He said, "If folks is here, they know they are, so the 'Here' will need to go."
He ripped it off and we held it up to picture the new word flow.

He said, "Well, if they're here and listening, they know this ain't no book
So we can take off the 'Spoken' to give the sign a better look."

Then he said, "You look and sound like part of the cowboy crew
So adding the word "Cowboy" is more than you need to do."

This left the word "Poetry" for my whole sign
And he said I wouldn't need that if they heard the words of mine.

Well, he balled it up to throw it out, so I'm left with not a line,
But, if he ain't buying drinks now, I think I'll keep my sign.

Your Inner Dragon

by the late Patricia Noble

One of my favorite songs is "Puff, the Magic Dragon," made popular by Peter, Paul, and Mary. Puff lived by the sea and frolicked around in the mist. He had a friend, a little boy, who brought him wonderful "little boy" things, "strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff."

Many people have tried to figure out the hidden meaning of this song. One way to interpret the song is to see Puff as the Magic Dragon that lives within us that we have to negotiate with in order to reach our goals in life. Puff is calling to us to bring him gifts and share our secret lives with him. Puff seems to want us to play and be distracted from the business of living our purpose.

I believe that Puff also represents our *vocation*. A vocation is the way in which we are called by some inner wisdom to express ourselves in everyday life. We may feel a call to *do* something – start a business, leave a relationship, move to another city, change careers, have a child. We might feel a call to *be* something – more creative, less judgmental, more loving, less fearful.

Have you heard your calling and followed it? Or have you held back, perhaps out of fear? Sometimes we don't pay attention to that inner voice calling us to do or to be something more than we are. Sometimes we fear what our calling may demand of us. Maybe we are afraid of our own power. *This fear is the magic dragon that frolics in the mist of our inner self.*

Freeing the Magic Dragon within us means that we must be willing to do three things. First, we must *release the parts of our lives that prevent us from following our calling*. Caroline Myss says, in her book ***Sacred Contracts***, we cannot come to know the depths of the purpose of our life if we are not willing to release those parts of our life that are no longer necessary.

Next, we must recognize that *there is a certain genius within us, a hidden design for our life that is calling out to be revealed and fulfilled*. Each person is a unique, individual creation, as different from all others as each one's fingerprints are different.

Finally, we must remember that *there is something that each one of us was born to accomplish*. Something that no one else can do, because we are uniquely suited for it. This is our personal, unique purpose. Our own greatness, waiting to be called forth.

When we give attention to our inner self, seeing Puff as the key to realizing our true purpose in life, symbolically bringing it “strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff,” in the form of living on purpose with a definite goal in mind, we are able to release our fears, reveal our unique life-design, and remember our purpose. When we do that, we free ourselves from the Magic Dragon within us that is keeping us from following our true vocation.

Sketch of a Creative Mind

Bill Black

A creative mind looks to a dark horizon
In a strange land and time
And determines if it is night deepening
Or dawn approaching
Or a gathering or departing storm.

With a pen as a sword,
And paper for a shield,
This strange world is faced alone.

Desired delights and dark demons
Can flash into the mind,
But in this darkness
It can never be known which it will be.

Delights and demons swirl
As figures on fate's slot machine wheels
And while reeling, one never knows

What combination will come up.

Streets and darkness call the secret name
Of the creative mind.
Drinks and drugs can hide the darkness
And quiet the call
To those who are weary of the battle
Or, drained of the desire to see
What the next challenge will be.
The marks and scars on paper by pen
Make maps of the memories
And narratives of the battles
Fought in these shadow worlds

The maps and narratives may be shared
And cause both delight and despair.
Few realize that what they have seen
Are epitaphs and eulogies
Of creative dreams

Finding Your Voice

Susan Cosby-Patton

As a teacher for over twenty years, I found that using an appropriate voice was very difficult for many of my students. Yet it is the voice that makes writing readable, understandable, and keeps your audience's attention. There are three aspects to take into consideration when determining a suitable voice for a piece of writing. They are purpose, emotion, and audience.

The first factor to consider in determining your voice is the purpose for writing. Are you writing to inform your reader? Motivate them? Persuade your audience to agree with an opinion you are expressing? Or perhaps to entertain them?

Informational writing is factual. It does not include opinions. It is designed for the audience to utilize the information you present. The purpose of informational writing can be instructional, as with a manual. It can be non-fiction, as with an historical essay. Reference materials are another example of informational writing.

Persuasive and motivational writing includes both facts and opinion; it is designed to evoke a response or a call to action from the audience. This form of writing is calculated to play on the emotions of the reader with an intended purpose, and there is often an element of bias included. This play on the reader's emotions and biases is neither good nor bad; it is simply a tool to accomplish your goal as a writer. Political speeches, marketing campaigns, even sermons, fall into the category of persuasive or motivational writing.

Writing with the purpose of entertaining creatively uses a combination of facts, opinion and make believe as a diversion. There are many genres of writing that are intended to entertain, including short stories, novels, and screenplays. Any of these can create thought-provoking moments, let the reader step back and experience life in the past, or even give a glimpse of what the future could possibly hold.

Some literary works combine more than one voice. However, when choosing to do this, the author should strive to focus on one primary purpose; otherwise, the message may become convoluted.

Understanding the purpose of your writing naturally leads to the second building block of finding your voice, the element of emotion, which contains two components. First is the emotion that the writer wishes to express, and second, the emotional response of the reader.

As a writer, how will you choose to approach your topic? Are you striving to be objectively informative? In which case, you need to eliminate emotionally triggering words and phrases. When sharing information, your voice should sound well-informed, perhaps technical, or even scholarly. You need to strive to present the facts, in a clear unbiased way that is free from your personal opinion.

With persuasive and motivational writing, you lay your opinion out for all to see. Strong and emotionally-charged language that grabs at the reader's heart is as important in this style of writing as the point you are trying to make. For both motivational and persuasive writing, the use of passionate words is meant to provoke an emotional reaction. Whether you are expressing anger, sadness, indignation or joy, your message should induce a personal response.

However, when seeking to entertain, you, the writer, are free to express your feelings. The use of informal language dispersed with jargon or slang can grab the reader's attention. There are even times when you may want your reader to be on an emotional roller coaster. You have succeeded when you have expressed your emotions so clearly that you've entertained your reader through indignation, laughter, and at times even tears.

The third consideration in writing is your audience—the individual or group for whom your writing is intended. Knowing your audience and making word choices that will be meaningful to them is the key to accomplishing your purpose. The easiest example of this is the language you would use if you were writing for a group of college professors versus writing for a class of second grade students. The four-syllable words you acquired through years of your own education would fly right over the heads of your younger readers. In contrast, the simple sentence structure of subject followed by a simple verb, which is ideal for beginning readers, would bore your professors.

Beyond the age and level of education of your prospective audience, you need to target the most effective means of communicating to them. For example, businessmen with pressing schedules seek only the information you can offer—clearly, concisely and to the point. If however, your audience is a group of retirees, with no time restraints, they may be able to enjoy the luxury of delving into an area of interest in great detail.

Another aspect of your audience that needs to be taken into consideration is their emotional state. Are you speaking to an angry audience? If you are speaking persuasively, does your audience support your point of view, or must you convince them to believe in your topic? The way you approach your topic and the words you choose must be carefully selected to fit where your audience is emotionally.

No matter how well you have constructed your writing, if you fail to create a strong voice, your reader may not fully understand the ideas you are presenting. If you find you are struggling to find your voice, I suggest you include these four questions in a prewriting exercise: What is the purpose of this piece? What emotions do you want to express? What response do you want from your reader? Who is your audience? When these issues are considered fully, you will find the voice that is most appropriate to the project at hand.

Words

Susan Cosby-Patton

Words fail me

lost in a jungle of feelings,
strangled by emotions
too raw to express.

Words, sustaining words,
inspired by love,

reaching across the country
like a hummingbird,
spreading life's nectar.

Words, powerful words,

plow onward
proving their point
without passion or pity.

Words, laughing, lyrical words,

light and lively,
give me joy,
brighten my day.

Words, bombarding, relentless words,
surround me

until I want to scream,
"Leave me in silence.

Be still and let me know my God."

Ghost Writer

Bill Black

There was one departed writer
With stories left to tell.
His spirit would pull a midnighter
At a typewriter in a hotel.

Each morning a neat pile was found
After the spirit had moved to vapors
Of the writer's nightly rounds.
The person who found the papers
Saw the work of a real storyteller.
The papers were published
And became a best seller.

But the dilemma was fun,
How do you get writer
Royalties to one
Who is only a ghostwriter?

A Brush of Many Colors

Jeanne Burrows-Johnson

Traditionally, practitioners in arts and letters are taught to appeal to their audience members' five basic senses – or to be more precise, to their sensory memories. Unlike a juggler, who may prefer perfect symmetry in the objects they balance, I believe weavers of word and design are drawn to work with the senses that call out to them personally.

In my own experience of life, there are three senses that predominate. The first is sight; and within the sense of vision, I find color to be more dominant than form. While activity and mood may affect my attraction to a color hue, subtlety of coloration, rather than vibrancy, keeps my attention. The second sense that beckons me, is hearing. In my audio perception, it is pitch that first catches my ear, but rhythm that engages my mind. The third sense I find meaningful is smell. When offered a new aroma, I am often impacted by its similarity or contrast to another already in the data bank of my sensory awareness. But occasionally, a scent comes softly, provoking a tantalizing, barely perceptible memory of another place and time.

As a writer, my canvas is paper, the electronic screen, or a voice-recording device. Like the brush of a painter, the stroke of my virtual or electronic pen draws its vigor from a rich palette. Through images that dance vividly before the mind's eye, variations in rhythm, and an inner quality of things almost beneath perception, I seek to engage the emotions, as well as the mind, of my audience.

Although projects vary, I draw from the same rainbow of evocative words, regardless of whether I am writing fiction, educational non-fiction, or promotional materials. My goal as a writer is for my readers and listeners to relate positively to the colors, sounds and scents I employ – and to attune themselves to the degree of leisure or urgency I have created for them to move within. Therefore, I seek to become nominally familiar with the target audience to whom I speak, knowing the elements of the landscape and unfolding action I create will be filtered through each of their locales, cultures and stages of life. Whether they thoroughly understand what I am writing about, I hope they will perceive the essence of what I seek to share.

Writer in Denial

Larry Sakin

I am a writer in denial.

I've wrestled with my instinctual urges towards the art form since my teen years. And yet, it keeps rearing its horrible head within me, forcing me to sacrifice family, friends, and the time for more worthy endeavors so I may slit metaphorical wrists and bleed words onto a sheet of 11 x 14 inch legal size yellow paper.

It's not easy. Being a writer is a bit like being a bulimic. Writers can go without writing for long periods and suddenly start to over-indulge the drama surrounding them, only to purge it all onto the page. Professional writers then have to pick through their purging to make it look pretty and dignified to the outside world. What a way to spend your life, eh?

It wasn't always like this for me. As a child, writing came easily. My imagination was vast and often ran amok in a series of exotic tales featuring an adventurous private detective named Fink. Fink was based on my Dad, a man I barely knew. In order to fill in the blank spots of Dad's personality, I gave Fink the character traits I would have liked to have seen in Dad – a hard-boiled confidence, tempered with compassion and ethics. Fink found himself in the midst of dank and foggy intrigue. At first, Fink was clueless as to how to navigate the dangerous mazes I put him in; but somehow, he always pulled off a pretentious, yet inventive escape, emerging as the hero again.

The series proved prophetic. While I never found the traits I wanted to in my Dad, he did become a private detective after many years in retail trade. Perhaps I knew him better than I thought I did.

I wrote occasionally in middle and high school, but was restless about it. When you're thirteen, you begin to realize that "hot" Victoria's Secret models are not usually seen in public with pasty-faced writers, but are captivated by the bad boys of rock n' roll. So, I charted my new course to fame and fortune, mangling several drum kits during those years.

I stayed in music for twenty-plus years but never bedded any lingerie models, dammit. However, the imaginative adventures from my childhood stories came alive during my years of touring music, and my soul was bursting from trying to contain them. But although writing seemed the perfect venue, I was reluctant. It's easy to write autobiographically about your personal adventures. However, the seasoned writer is supposed to assign significant meaning to such wanderlust, finding deep psychological and spiritual motivations for it that the artist can then exploit to the nth degree.

Such an exercise would be fruitless for me. There are no deep hidden meanings in my travels. It was just my job. My views were usually limited to the inside of hotels, concert halls and venue green rooms. Any free time was spent getting comfortable enough to sleep, much less scribble down a record of my subconscious epiphanies from an imagined spiritual sojourn.

Besides, writing is a solitary business. There is a certain aloofness writers need to maintain so they can jerk their emotional lives to absurd proportions, gaining a fully realized pro- or antagonist to bully through a novel. The problem is, all this self-brutality tends to leave long, ugly stretches of scar tissue upon one's spirit.

Writers do all of this so they may someday bask in a tiny glow of recognition. Along the way they must pay their dues, encountering spiteful critiques by mean-spirited reviewers who like vultures alit upon a desiccated, lonely sea, scavenge bones with little meat on them for their own sustenance. It doesn't end there. Writers are constantly compared to past masters, who, before fame, were as taken for granted by critics as squashed bugs on a car grill.

Despite these drawbacks I plunged ass-over-tea-kettle into writing with a vengeance in my forties. Political opinion pieces, music and book reviews, interviews, personal essays and a few unfinished novels later, I still pursue this flinty mistress with the same passion previously reserved for lingerie models. What a demented man I've become.

And yet, I refuse to call myself a writer. It doesn't appear on any of my business cards and when people ask about what I do, I never mention writing. Perhaps it's the image I think others have of writers, or because of the inevitable question, "Have you written anything I might have read?" The answer is likely an astonishing, "No," and in my mind that leaves a void in conversation that may have led to better things than empty words. Unless you're a successful writer, no one really cares that you write.

So for the moment, I'll remain in my denial. Perhaps the day will come when I reach rock-bottom, and I'll have to finally admit to my writing support group that I am, indeed, a writer. I'll

have to take my lumps and follow the twelve-step program that includes remedial lessons in punctuation and grammar, and call my brothers and sisters in Word-aholics Anonymous whenever the mood strikes me to pull out my Royal Fast-Touch portable typewriter, and finish that novel that's just aching to leap out of me. But until then, I'll pickle myself in word-play, creating pretentious and inventive escapes from reality, to emerge victorious as the hero again.

Yesterday

Susan Cosby-Patton

Four poems poured from my brain
like flies on a feeding frenzy
swarming around a summer salad.

Today
my mind
is a barren womb
void of life
dormant
a waste land
of despair.

Why are words so capricious?

Sometimes they crowd my head
'til I feel my brain will burst
like fireworks on the Fourth of July
filling the sky with glorious color.

Other times
I am
empty
a
dried-up leaf
drifting
in
the wind