

Television isn't what makes inspired writers, honesty is

This week I am writing to my fellow soldiers, the writers. The ones who spend so much time clicking away at the keys, trying to make sense of the world using the simplest method of all.

I'm not just talking to the professionals or the people who get paid to write, I'm talking to anyone who writes — be it the ones who write poems, essays, love letters, songs or press statements.

I've taken my fair share of writing classes — the ones that teach about the bare bones of technical jargon, subject-verb agreement, dependent clauses and fragmented phrases. Those ideas and tools are useful, no doubt. But what I'm interested in is the soul of writing.

You see, I have been thinking about the whole notion of writing lately, its effects on life, its message, reasoning, cause and purpose. For most of us (or them, depending on whose side you're on), the written word has taken a back seat to the stale images and placid content of moving colors in succession (in other words, television) and I have to say, that is rocking me.

Writing seems to stir the dark corners of the mind and heart and sometimes makes us feel sad, terrible, raw and spent. When I think of writing, my blood pressure starts rising, the heart starts palpitating, my muscles tense up and I want to get it over with. Sometimes it tears me down. But in that process, a new form takes shape within me. One that is stronger, more fluid and easily able to cope and understand. It relates to what psychologist Carl Jung calls the Shadow. Loosely defined, these are the things we pack away: the unconscious that we don't like to share with others, or even accept ourselves.

Jung once wrote, "Nothing is so apt to challenge our self-awareness and alertness as being at war with oneself.

One can hardly think of any other or more effective means of waking humanity out of the irresponsible and innocent half-sleep of the primitive mentality and bringing it to a state of conscious responsibility."

I like to think I relish in the art of challenge. I write. I collapse. I begin again. I live in my shadow quite often and let it envelope me. I thrive on it, because it makes me stronger.



Carl Sundberg

Reasoning with madness

If more people tapped their inner resources, we may all be a little better off. We might just find that we care every now and then. Jung also noted the Shadow follows us all. Personally, I'm just beginning to recognize it, study and embrace it. But don't be afraid of it like so many others.

Forget what society tells you and write what challenges you, what scares you, and what you lock away. This is the key to explosive and powerful writing. Yet many people will never accept this. They will tell you to write what everyone else wants to hear. "Write for the audience," the stale professor says. These people are simple goons who will go to the grave having contributed nothing. Pass them like a swerving old man on the freeway.

Most importantly: Read, damn it, READ! With every book you ingest, your writing will get sharper, more accurate, stronger and deeper. Trust me — mine has. I hated reading when I was younger (except comic books, of

course). Now I can't stop. I read like 2 to 5 books a week, no joke.

Start reading things you really like. Eventually, you'll find yourself reading anything you can get your hands on. I tell you what, books are my sanctuary because they let me get my head straight (or out of it sometimes). They teach me things, they inspire me, and they put life in perspective like nothing else in the world can, except for exotic or exceptional life experiences, which are few and far between.

For me, it's all about the written word. Learn to love it, or forget being a writer. If you can't enjoy a good book or learn to crap on the bad ones, you won't ever leave the hack phase.

Oh, and one last thing: Stop watching television. It really does rot your brain and give you sick ideas about how life should work. It's just a commercial projector. Nothing more. The entertainment function has been lost somewhere between the Subway and Old Navy ads. It's used for brainwashing and programming. It's rotting America's soul every waking minute, making us consumers, making us victims and addicts who are stupid and cranky. It is the perfect drug indeed. What other way can you describe it? What other device has the potential to make us sit for hours on end doing nothing, saying nothing, thinking nothing and never once stepping outside to see the sun? Television. Plain and simple. Burn it to the ground and write something. You gotta start somewhere.

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