

LSE Literary Festival creative writing workshop

Why Do You Write? And Can Knowing That Even Help?

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Author, Randall, or The Painted Grape and Independent's weekly Friday Book Design Blog





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Why Do You Write? And Can Knowing That Even Help?

Welcome to this Creative Writing workshop in the Space for Thought Literary Festival 2015. In keeping with the overarching theme of this year's festival I will be exploring the foundations of the impulse to write. My hope is that exposing the foundations of the creative act can inform the writer's practice in the here and now. Though in part we'll be looking at our personal histories of writing, the exercises will be geared towards producing new work, with a deeper understanding of what our goals actually are. While you're waiting for the session to begin, perhaps you can start to think about this question:

Why do I write?

Jot down some ideas. If you're here early, perhaps turn it into a paragraph or two.

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Why Do You Write?

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Why Do You Write?

Inward reasons

Outward reasons



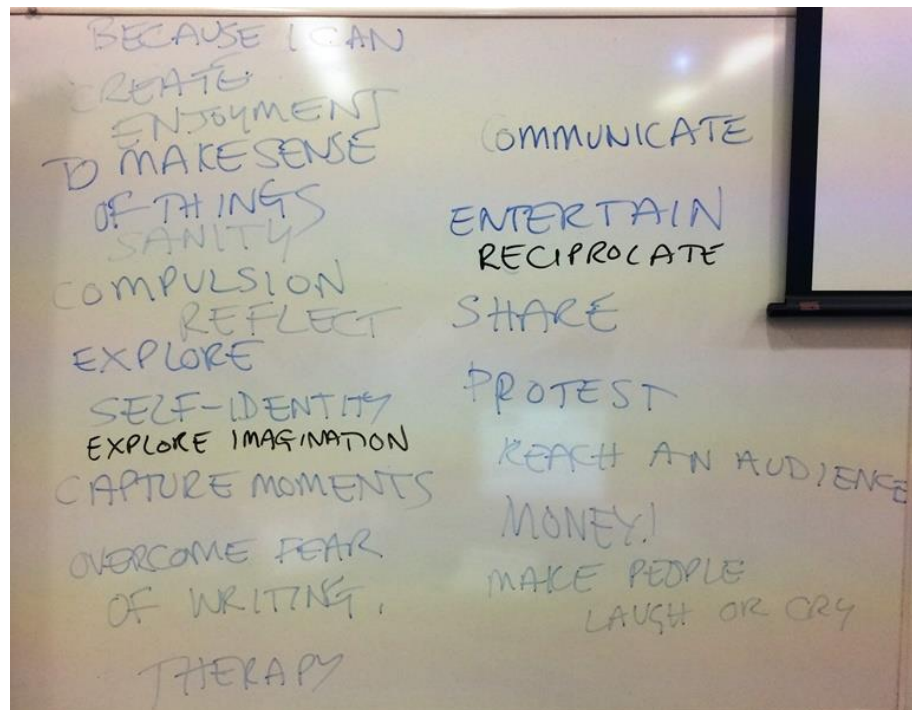
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Why Do You Write?

Inward reasons

- Replicate the joy and intensity of reading
- Understand something about yourself
- Understand something about the world
- Emulate your favourite writer
- The sheer thrill of creation
- Entertain yourself

Outward reasons

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Why Do You Write?

Inward reasons

- Replicate the joy and intensity of reading
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- The sheer thrill of creation
- Entertain yourself

Outward reasons

- Get rich and famous
- Express or share something about yourself
- Express or share something about the world
- Impose your ideas on others
- Contribute to the culture, or the conversation, as you see it
- Impress others / make yourself seem more interesting / get laid

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Looking inward: the reading child

- **Writing exercise:** Picture yourself as a child, reading
- Describe what you are reading, and your reaction to it
- Write in the first person (“I am sitting / lying / in my room / in the garden...”)
- Immerse yourself in the experience

Five minutes

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The reading child: from the outside

- **Writing exercise:** Now turn that reading child into a character.
- Describe yourself from the point of view of a parent / relative / family friend.
- Observe the child reading, and comment on their behaviour. Describe what they're *like*, reading, and what reading makes them like.

Five minutes

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The adult child: in situ

- You've invented a character. They are based on you as a child, but they are not you now, or not quite. Now we are going to take that character and grow them up into an adult. That character, that not-quite-you, is a grown-up
- **Writing exercise:** They are on a luxury cruise liner – transatlantic, Mediterranean, Caribbean, Nordic fjords. Travelling alone? With others? It's up to you
- The setting for this scenelet is the casino. Get your character into the casino. Choose what you're going to play and go to that table. Start playing if you have time. Write in the third person
- What to play? Roulette, Baccarat, Poker, Blackjack / Twenty-one / Pontoon

Ten minutes

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The adult child: in action

- Keep writing your scene. Your character (A) stops playing whatever they were playing and goes to the bar to order a drink
- While they are there another character (B) comes up to them and starts a conversation. Perhaps they offer to buy them a drink
- Willingly or unwillingly your character enters into a conversation with them. Develop some dialogue

Five minutes

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The adult child: intrigued

- Continue the scene. Your new character (B) now discloses that she or he is ill, as in very ill
- Perhaps your character (A) noticed this, perhaps not. Perhaps the information came in answer to a question, or perhaps it was dropped into the conversation, or disclosed some other way
- Consider how this information might change the dialogue, change the scene. Continue writing and see how far you can push this new situation

Five minutes

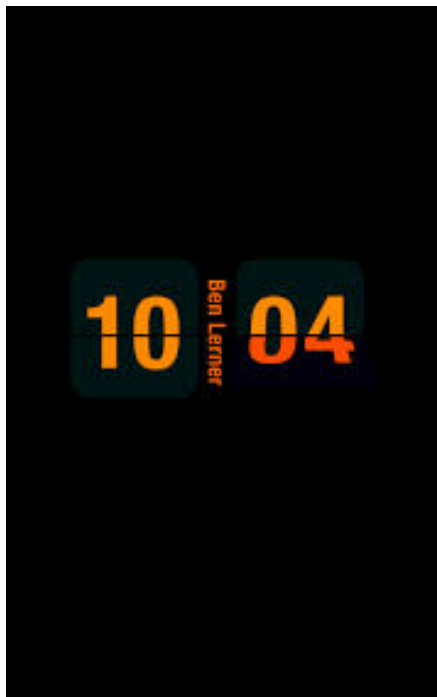
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Looking outward



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Looking outward



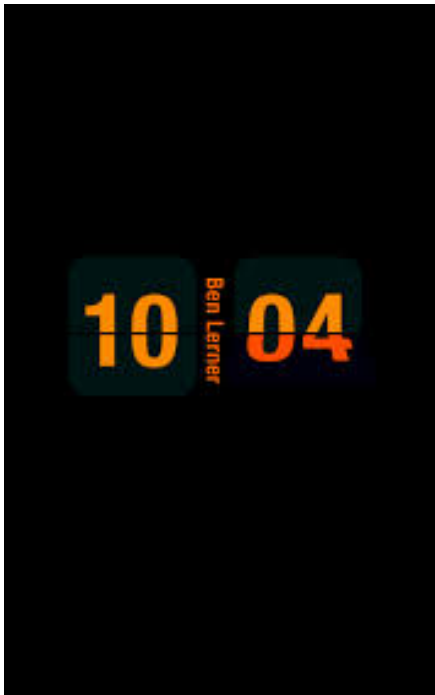
“We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for the journey and waved goodbye and ‘slipped the surly bonds of earth’ to ‘touch the face of God.’”



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Looking outward



“We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for the journey and waved goodbye and ‘slipped the surly bonds of earth’ to ‘touch the face of God.’”

“What were Christa McAuliffe’s last words to her husband? You feed the kids – I’ll feed the fish; What does NASA stand for? Need Another Seven Astronauts; How do they know what shampoo Christa McAuliffe used? They found her head and shoulders.”



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Looking outward



“I make no claims for ‘High Flight’ as a poem – in fact, I think it’s a terrible poem – and Ronald Reagan I consider a mass murderer. I don’t see anything formally interesting about the *Challenger* jokes; they weren’t funny even at the time. But I wonder if we can think of them as bad forms of collectivity that can serve as figures of its real possibility; prosody grammar as the stuff out of which we build a social world, a way of organizing meaning and time that belongs to nobody in particular but courses through us all.”

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Looking outward: *your* avenues of engagement

- What you should write about is what you are *particularly* (Henry James would say *fatally*) interested in
- **Writing exercise:** Write a dating profile for yourself listing your interests – or rather your fascinations. Try to think of six things.
- Be specific. Try to think *what it is* about those things that intrigue or fascinate you
- Don't say 'Loves pets'. Say what it is about dogs/cats/hamsters that deeply, fundamentally engage you as a human
- Don't say 'Likes going to the movies/hillwalking/cooking'. Say what it is about those activities that shines a light on your personality
- If you are going to write something that engages with the culture, or with the conversation, then maybe it will treat one of these subjects – or use those aspects of *you* that they engage

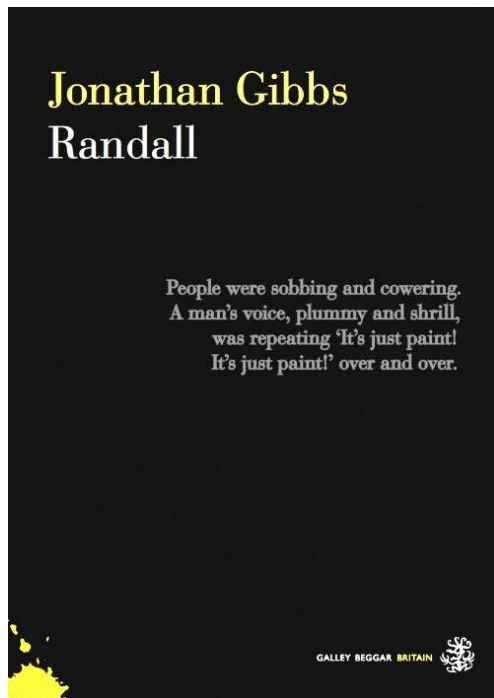
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Looking inward / looking outward



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