



Creative Workshops

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Writing Newsletter Feb 2021

re-story, re-create and
re-imagine your life and
work

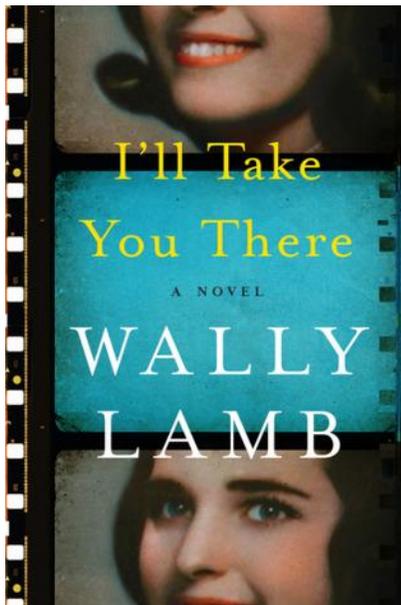
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for this letter, ongoing
opportunities + 'what's on.'

Dear seeker of words and images

Everything is a tragedy viewed close up and a comedy in the long shot
(Charlie Chaplin)

Your life as a Movie



In Wally Lamb's novel, Felix, a film scholar and lecturer, runs a Monday-night movie club in what was once the Garde vaudeville theatre. Ghosts from the theatre's past appear. Lois Weber (1879-1939) a silent film actress, screenwriter, producer and director gets Felix to enter the screen to revisit his childhood in the 1950s and 1960s. Lamb writes:

"That's what movies are, right? Thousands of still pictures taken months or years or decades before—streams of images burned onto celluloid that are reeled in front of a lamp and projected onto a screen, allowing us the illusion that they're alive. Flickers of light and dark. Brightness and shadow that won't stand

still—like life itself."

Perhaps during lockdown time you have been movie watching, seeing your life flicker on a screen? What are your childhood movie loves? Me swapping comics in a Saturday morning 'bioscope' queue. Stamping my feet as the stage-coach with runaway horses races towards the precipice, following the fortunes of *Francis*, *the Talking Mule*. *The Wizard of Oz* bursting sudden into colour. *Casper*

ghosting the frame, Popeye spinach green. Later *Casablanca*, *Ben Hur*, *Doctor Zhivago* . and and and.

And anguishing over the doctor who had taken his suffering wife's life (mercy killing) then disguised himself as a circus clown, Buttons, to escape detection. Never removed his painted face. And in a train crash, in order to save a life, he blew his cover. (*The Greatest Show on Earth*, Cecil B Demile, with James Stewart as Buttons.) 1952.

An impressionable 8 yr old, the story moved in me. When the circus train crashes Buttons is about to take off, shaking off Gregory, the FBI agent, shadowing him. Holly, trapeze artist, now in love with Brad, circus manager, pleads with him to stay to save Brad's life as he lies bleeding under a coach. The FBI agent assists Buttons then his reluctant arrest. Buttons exits with the words "I'm going to see my gal."

As a teacher, lifting the celluloid circle from a tin cannister, large as a steering wheel, threading the projector with the loop so it does not snag...the whirl of cogs, the bulb alight, the reverse count down... the illusion of moving stills breaking into movement and sound.



In the 80s in Palo Alto for a Fullbright, writing my *The Writer's Voice* , going to a movie theatre much like the one Lamb describes, watching *Swing Time* - a film that my parents courted to in the dress-up days in the early 1940s. As in day of old, the pianist played a prelude, then she and instrument sank into the pit to curtains swishing open. The elderly audience applaud dance sequences as if this were a live performance.

What of movies about movies? *Cinema Paradiso*? And the 1952 classic, *Singin' in the Rain* - the journey of a production company in the late 1920s transitioning out of the silent film era, to pictures - 'the Talkies'?

What of European movies as opposed to a stereotypical Hollywood ones that insult our imagination and intelligence ? I often suggest to writers I mentor

'write cinematically.' The old adage show rather than tell. In a movie, unless you are over-voicing, you don't say 'she was sad.' You show her face, gestures, walk, the rain against the window pane to convey her internal weather and enable the watcher to work it out. And there is room for us to place our individual story against this sadness. This privileges the physicality of the 5 senses in the writer/reader exchange. As a writer, don't do the readers' work and so diminish their participation in a shared experience.

In movies, art imitates life and life, art. As in Bosman's (Oom Schalk) *Ox Wagons on Trek*. When the volk are in Zeerust for the *Nagmaal* (communion) 'The Lord spreads these festivities over so many days that you have time, not only to go to church, but also to go to the bioscope.' Both Oom Scalk and Minnie saw a film about a charismatic rogue so Minnie changed her mind about a suitor. En route home, her father tells Oom Schalk 'Minnie wants a mysterious sort of man. She wants a man who's dishonest, but who's got foreign manners and a good heart. She saw a man like that at the picture place she went to, and since then...'

When a stranger, Koos Fichardt, gallops out of the veld they enjoy a brief romantic encounter before the police catch up with him. Oom Schalk ends the story: 'What I will always remember, however, is the slow look in Minnie's eyes. It was a kind of satisfaction, almost... all the things that had come to the girl she'd seen in the picture, had now come to her too.'



Vedic scripture offers the image of two birds, inseparable friends, who take refuge in the same tree. One eats the sweet fig, the other watches without eating. As we develop the witness to our lives, watching with compassion not judgement, we become both birds. As in watching ourselves on a movie screen. Paradoxically the more I watch the story of my life, the more I engage in the intimate moment.

Something larger than life in movies, visiting our days as they flash by, inspiring this poem:

Cinematic Speed

I love the generation film
that spans the forehead
of a family line.
the wheel spins hair
on a ninety minute reel,
forming fluff, now blond
then grey, now silver shade
sewn on a wintry head.
seasons stitch the hands
that scatter seeds, with moles.
baby skin toughens in the sun,
stretches then flakes to brittle bone.
the flower of a face buds,
blossoms and withers
in a cinematic speed up.
before my flickering eyes,
as a life flashes by in strips,
I see my stills in cycle.

This letter links to zoom(ernang) storyshop offerings, arriving in Feb/March. -

Your Life, your Movie. For anyone who:

- + wants to view their life through an exciting lens
- + is writing autobiography, biography, poetry, fiction ...
- + relishes the larger than 'liveness' of film
- + would like to join like-minded folk on a journey

Session 1: Your Life on the Big Screen - Sun 21 Feb

So what's your title? Opening scene? Defining moments? Edge experiences? Plot?
Supporting cast? Fellow creatures with skin, fur, fin or feather?

Session 2: Music, Scapes and Architecture - Sun 14 March (US *time change)

What music score? Songs that evoke memories? Landscapes and seascapes? Places
that hold energy for you? The architecture of the buildings?

Session 3: Synchronicities, Mysteries and Rolling Credits? - Sun 28 March

Synchronicities? Mysteries? What recurrent themes and repeated patterns?
What symbols carry power for you? How would you represent them? What angles,

lighting? What close-ups? Zoom moments? Where do you cut? What do you leave off screen? And the ending... and rolling credits?

SA time 15.00-18.00 USA east coast 08.00-11.00 then 09.00 -12.00*

Preparation? - Watch a few favourite movies as if you are a director learning the trade. Consider the questions. If interested, please make contact.

May 're-flickology' enlarge our lives.

Dorian