



Creative Wordshops
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Writing Letter June 2021



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

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

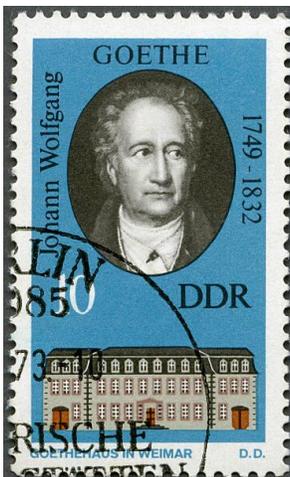
The Writer's Apprentice

We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master
 (Ernest Hemingway)

Dear seeker of words and images

During the 13th and 14th centuries craft guilds oversaw the practice of their particular craft/trade. Some formed secret societies. Freeman, bound to a guild, were journeymen craftsmen while the apprentices or trainees were bound or indentured to a master craftsman for seven years. The apprentice at the end of the training presented a masterpiece to the Wardens.

Guilds still exist today, representing local crafts and tradespeople in traditional skills, plus guilds for actors and writers. This is the ancestral line for mentors and coaches? Perhaps our modern internships and shadowing is a pale shadow?



In Goethe's 1797 ballad, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, a sorcerer leaves his workshop after setting his apprentice chores. Enter the ego. Tired of fetching water by pail, the apprentice enchants a broom to do the work for him, using magic in which he is not fully trained:

I 'm now master,
 I 'm tactician,
 All his ghosts must do my bidding.
 Know his incantation,

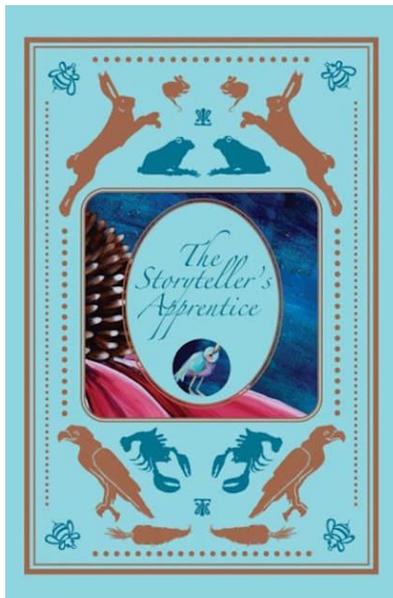
Spell and gestures too;
By my mind's creation
Wonders shall I do.

The broom gets busy:

Like a whirlwind he is going
To the stream, and then in
Like an engine he is throwing
Water for my use; with flurry
Do I watch the steady;
Not a drop is spilled,
Basin, bowls already
Are with water filled.

As the workshop floods and the broom trashes the place the apprentice cannot remember the incantation to turn the wild creature back into a broom:

Master, come to my assistance -
Wrong I was in calling
Spirits, I avow,
For I find them galling,
Cannot rule them now.



Many other novels and movies show our fascination with this archetype. As in the blurb to this novel:

In Loden, coming of age means becoming an apprentice. Though all of the villagers expect Arella's sister to become the storyteller's apprentice, it is Arella who is chosen. Arella, forced to leave her childhood home and face her biggest fears, follows an unexpected path of adventure, hardship, and enchantment. She learns to appreciate the power in a name and the importance of sharing stories. Along the way, Arella accepts her own talents and learns to listen to see the magic around her.

Writing and story-telling are part of an ongoing apprenticeship, a paradoxical cultivating of beginner's mind. Here is a poem I wrote some fifteen year ago:

The Storyteller's Art

the Great Storyteller knows when
to tap his pipe on the boot of creation,
to roll the drama down the mountain,
flood the plain, trumpet down walls,
arrest a man with a burning bush,
fly chariots across the sky.

bring in the who of story,
a snake, he , she , the apple core.
fireword prophets, lusty Kings,
queens and pomegranate lovers,
brother-betrayers, fishermen
a whale who coughs up a man.

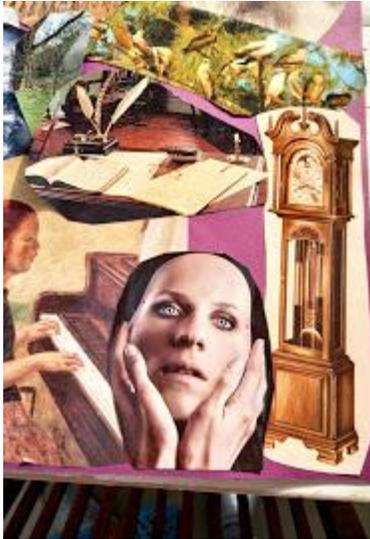
knows how to arrange the tale
choreograph the where,
three crosses on a hill
a leading star lighting a stable
a broken-open tomb
a ghostwalk with a stranger.

so the story mounts on eagle wings.
spits sight, eye to eye
in the lightening flash, the love look.
in the once upon a miracle play.
the divine teller entices us
to his art, to apprentice us.

A student artist might copy a master in a gallery. Then develop her/his own style. True for a writer too. The first activity in The Writer's Voice course I offer, involves non-writing. The blurb reads:

We begin with a month of reading for reading teaches us how to write. You choose 2 writers or poets that you are passionate about and engage closely with their texts. You copy out by hand a passage from each. You learn 2 passages/poems by heart. It's about getting inside the skin of a writer. Feeling their rhythms. Now write up your observations in your journal.

But what of passing on your passion, your calling? What can be taught and what is thumb print? The unique calling? 'I am a part of all that I have met' says Tennyson's Ulysses. How to make space for the other person's quest and inspiration that have led her/him here?



I recently created this collage around the question 'what am I being asked to do (Deo Volente) over the next three years - 77 to 80? ' No words 21 pictures. (Image here of bottom right quarter). I allow the culled magazine pictures to choose me. Among the images the grandfather clock. In the imaginative tradition I dialogue with it. This pendulum clock acquired its ancestral name only after the song *Grandfather's Clock*, (1876) became popular:

It was bought on the morn of the day that he was born
And was always his treasure and pride
But it stopped, short never to go again
When the old man died....
Ninety years without slumbering
His life seconds numbering....
My grandfather said that of those he could hire
Not a servant so faithful he found
For it wasted no time and had but one desire
At the close of each week to be wound

So it is a story clock and parts of the decoded meaning of this symbol is in the story. Questions arise as I listen to its heart beat, its rhythm. How can I keep the clock going after my death so it can keep story time for others? How do I wind it up with the necessary tension so it can keep time? How do I stand tall? What can its chiming ritual teach me? A childhood memory surfaces based the Westminster 16 note chime:

All through this hour Lord, be my guide
that by thy power no foot shall slide.

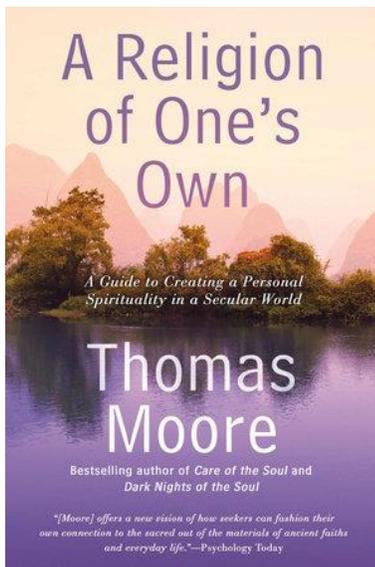
Though I have grafted an evolving onto an inherited faith, how can I interpret this song metaphorically?

And the grandfather clock is just one of 21 collage images. What of the mask, the young girl at the piano, the three inkpot quills?

I sometimes wonder what will die when Creative Wordshops dies with me? With the merry 80s only some 38 months away, I begin to wonder how/if I can train younger apprentices, lovers of words? What would such a journey involve? Such an interactive course? A sharing of genius, in the abiding indwelling sense of the word? Or is such an individual story death part of the cycle, the great wheel too? Letting go?

Here's David Whyte:

The act of loving itself, always becomes a path of humble apprenticeship, not only in following its difficult way and discovering its different forms of humility ... but strangely, through its fierce introduction to all its many astonishing and different forms, where we are asked continually and against our will, to give ...without knowing exactly, or in what way, when or how, the mysterious gift will be returned.



I'm currently reading this Thomas Moore. He regards Emerson as one of his mentors who drew on sources "such as the Neoplatonists going back to ancient Greece, Eastern teachings from India, and Sufi writings from poets like Hafiz."

We are apprentice to other writers and their influences. This is partly how we create our calling - our work in the world.

Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning, and under every deep a lower deep opens (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Dorian

On what's on radar...

Running round the Writer's Block: 2 Zoom sessions

Sun 13 June and Sun 11 July SA Time 15.00-18.00 R320 each (R600 for both)

"It's easy to write. You just shouldn't have standards that inhibit you from writing" (William Stafford) We relax, we give ourselves permission to write out of our poverty. Tomorrow might bring riches. Join the sessions to find ways of jumping off the bridge into the river flow.

