

Chapter Thirteen

WRITING II

He who knows not the heart of words cannot know the heart of man.

Confucius



— BEGINNINGS —

MH Transcending the So-called “Real” World

All of those early efforts were good for me, precisely because they failed. I tried to fit into the so-called “real” world and to function in it, but my high ideals proved unsatisfactory to my more materialistic, functionally oriented bosses. This so-called “real world” is an utter madhouse, of course. Everything is turned upside down. Greed, amoral pragmatism, "just win, baby," do whatever you have to do to come out on top — these and related notions have become the ultimate values. They supercede sharing, compassion, integrity, personal responsibility, and Higher Consciousness.

It's a horror show, this so-called "real" world, insane, brutal, absolutely unworthy of our highest and most creative nature. Not only that, but its values, twisted as they are, are celebrated and promulgated everywhere — in churches, in schools, in advertising, in music, on TV, everywhere. There's nothing whatsoever "real" about it. We're killing each other every day, even as we systematically murder the earth itself, all in the name of God, flag, "protection" and profit.

I have nothing to do with this lunacy. It's a nightmare. Indeed, I found myself unable to function in it. Buckminster Fuller felt the same way. At one point, he seriously considered suicide, calling himself "a useless throw-away."

However, my failed efforts were good in that they showed me where I did NOT fit *and* they opened my eyes to various opportunities and possibilities in other domains — namely, music and writing.

Even as you are enjoying your book reviewing and finding a degree of success with it, so have others done the same, notably George Bernard Shaw, who started off as a music and drama critic, even as yours truly worked his way into publishing by writing about music and musicians. By writing about music and musicians, I enjoyed a crash course in learning how to structure thoughts with clarity and linguistic dexterity. What a joy!

This may be a really good route for you. At certain levels writing reviews does not earn a lot of money, but as you meet editors and publishers and other writers, literary and professional doors open for you. Meanwhile, my friend, you are the only person I know whose writing can be found in the Vatican! Keep scribbling — for all you know, it may lead to fame and fortune!

Even if it doesn't, the process of writing in and of itself does wonders. It teaches one how to think clearly, how to feel deeply, and how to articulately transmute insubstantial thoughts and feelings into concrete language. I say, Go for it!

JS

One Brick at a Time

At the moment, right *now* at the new beginning, don't worry about openings, beginnings or closings to a whole book. Just approach each new chapter the same way you approached the one you sent me —

What do you want to portray? What mood or feeling and series of events do you want to cover? How and where do you want to begin this particular chapter; how and in what ways do you want the chapter's story to unfold? What are you building toward at the end of the chapter? How can you order the events and feelings in ways that will both create a dynamic flow and lead to the chapter's conclusion? What do you want to end the chapter with?

Treat each chapter as a little book unto itself with a beginning, middle and end. Create one brick at a time. Then make links — each chapter's conclusion is a springboard into the next chapter. Gradually, you will come to see the shape the book-as-a-whole is taking. After everything's done, *then* go back, reconsider everything from the big picture (overall structure) to individual words, spellings, punctuation, sentences, etc. (specifics).

Meanwhile, J, you're giving a lot of heart and soul to the writing, and perhaps that, more than anything else, makes the journey worthwhile. First and foremost, the writing is its own reward. Later, down the line, after you have given yourself to the work and the work feels complete, only then concern yourself with the next step.

MH

Free-Association Poetry

I think it's great you are exploring free-association poetry. That's a terrific way to tap into the power zones lying just beneath waking consciousness. Then, later (if you feel like it), you can go back and distill and intensify whatever has come through.

Much of my poetry has been written this way. For me, and perhaps for you too, this kind of free form, improvisational writing is a deeply fulfilling process. It releases tons of images, feelings, thoughts, and language that one didn't even realize one had. It opens creativity's flood gates.

That is also the way I play music. Of course, music flies up in the air and disappears, while poetry on the page remains as an artifact that can serve either as a finished work in itself, or as linguistic clay which one can touch up or shape any way one likes.

Whatever results from the process, the process itself is exciting, stimulating, creative. One never knows what will emerge — that's the adventure of it, yes?

AS

Poetry & Music Give Wings to Spirit

How, perceptive of you to keep on keepin' on with painting and lots of writing, poetry in particular. Writing poetry is a terrific way to keep the energy flowing into direct, non-preconceptual states of clarity-without-thought — to get into that zone that precedes thought and expresses perception directly, on its own.

That's where I go when I improvise music. At first, *before* I have lost my thought-self, the music stays more or less on the surface. As I become more deeply involved, thought-consciousness fades and the music starts taking on a life of its own. When I finally *disappear*, only the music remains — a river-rush of sonic beauty. The music “plays itself,” as my ol' friend Lao Tzu might phrase it.

Nourishing the creative stream by writing poetry or playing music gives wings to Spirit.

SL Language, Sex, Love, and Art

By all means rest assured that there is not a word in the world which in and of itself offends me. I've seen just about everything, and done just about everything, and thought and read and written just about everything, so I am rarely shocked by the creative, life-affirming use of language.

Early on, D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller and three comedians, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin and Richard Pryor, helped me pass through that valley of absurd American neurosis. If ever I DO find myself offended by language, it's because I'm offended by the speaker and his/her values — the unawakened or stupid or malicious intent that infuses the words — George Bush, for example, where war is peace; where ripping off the country and killing thousands of people in wars is a good thing that will strengthen the nation; chaos is order; where stupid is brilliant, ignorance is fortitude, lies are truths, etc. You see what I mean. Meanwhile, in yours and my case, I think our values are marvelously enlightened — let language be our playground! Relax. Say anything you like, using any words that express your meanings. Language is a writer's tool, after all. And every tool in the mind needs to be understood, honed, and used whenever appropriate.

I love the fact that you have a quick and curious mind. You look into words and thoughts. You pay attention to details — like why the pigeons roost where they do. And of course, you touch my heart with comments such as the ones you made about your mother, and how she could have benefited from the liberation you feel — “Freedom to express oneself, to be open and honest, to have opinions, to indulge her female anatomy, to be filled with delicious humor and perhaps a little darkness when required. The sort of things that I TAKE FOR GRANTED! It might have saved her! Or at least given her a sense of her own self-worth.”

That sense of self-worth, however acquired, dear S, is essential for vitality, inner beauty, and creativity. It's one of the reasons I recommended D.H.'s *Chatterley* to you, to emphasize and validate in you that sense of self-worth — in language, thought, body consciousness, sex, love and art.

SL

Books On Writing

Terrific you took my suggestion and you're reading Mailer's book, *The Spooky Art*. Very nice of your husband to buy you a copy for your birthday. I know Mailer wants us to read from front to back, which is of course the best way, but I've also found it fun to jump around. Just leap in, or, the opposite, go to a specific topic page and check it out.

Don't worry about the occasional density of his writing. These pieces, as you know, were taken from different times in his career, so the style varies. And once you stretch a bit to get it, hey, the going gets easy, if only because he has so much to say about so many different areas — the writer's psyche, formal problems, critics and how to cope with criticism (something I still find it almost impossible to do gracefully), other writers and their books, etc.

I've also found it a pleasure to take that book with me whenever I know I'll be waiting somewhere for a while — like getting new tires for the car, or getting a medical checkup, whatever. Great to dip in, spend some time with ol' Norman. Wonderful to hang out with somebody who's talking about a subject that very few others can deal with (or care to).

Ol' Norman takes it out there sometimes. I overlook certain things, and make reservations for differences of generation, experience, temperament, and psycho-spiritual evolutionary development, but at the same time he hones in on dozens of insights that I find tough, honest, and extremely helpful (like his extended rap on improvisation in the Tango chapter, from p. 224 to the end).

Once again, I took his book with me, just today, and while waiting for Sonia in the eye doctor's office, spent several hours dipping into it, hanging out with Norm, enjoying his well-honed sentences, getting a kick out of his insight and honesty.

There's a wonderful (and shorter) book on writing that was a great inspiration and comfort and nourishment to me — *Henry Miller On Writing*. It includes pieces on writing selected from different books he wrote. Also good books—Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* and Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*.

Always enjoy hearing from you, S. You are having some marvelous experiences and raising great questions that stimulate my own thinking. Thanks!

— CRITICISM —

JS

What A Ride!

I think the main point that seems so difficult to get is this: Nearly everybody approaches everything with eyes that are already clouded by Yes/No judgments. They like something or someone, or they dislike it. Then they like or dislike somebody's evaluation of it only in terms of whether or not the evaluation coincides with their own preconceived likes or dislikes.

Well, in my writing I give the full picture. I give the strengths AND weaknesses. So those who agree with the weaknesses part, cry Yes! Those who agree with the strengths part also cry Yes! And both scream No! at the other position. Neither wants to see the whole picture in all of its ramifications, hence there's been some controversy over some of the things I have said in this Tim and Jeff Buckley arena. Ah, well.

Then, when the bright ones cool out, they come around and say, "Well, yeah, I can see how you were being fair, how you can see clearly, how, yes, I have even learned something."

In between the rejection and the acceptance of what I say, there is sometimes this incredibly violent, tumultuous period, in which I am both crucified and hailed as Brilliant, after which, if I am lucky, I am simply appreciated as one who sees clearly and fairly, and has courage enough to speak honestly and truly.

This writing thing is not an easy gig, J. But neither is it boring. And very, very often, it is truly worthwhile. What a ride!

JS

Only You Can Judge

It is good you read your work to others. That gives you feedback as to how the work is being perceived, and can be helpful in many ways, perhaps especially technically. But it is a dangerous way to go, too, because it can dilute your own point of view and instill doubt and make you dependent upon other people's opinions instead of your own deepest feelings.

Whenever you read to others, remember that their reservations and criticisms may be (and often are) the result, not of their insight and knowledge and skill, but of their conditioned tastes, limited perceptions, and lack of intelligence, insight and empathy.

Only you can be the judge of them and of yourself. Only you are responsible, and only you can answer to yourself. You have to carefully evaluate not only what is said about the writing, but who is saying it. It's a lonely road, because ultimately nobody can point the way or do it for you. But it is an exciting road, too, because you are exploring yourself and your own thoughts and feelings, and making the effort to reach out to others. There is drama and challenge on both of those fronts, which makes the journey exhilarating!

Thanks so much for sending me the chapter. I printed it out and am putting in a file of your things.

All the best, L

JS **Guns, Bowie Knives, Intellectual Muggers**

Thanks for your understanding, insight and support. Greatly appreciate it. I really like your late father's stance — he just kept on keepin' on, doing his thing, moving forward, which is what I intend to do when *Blue Melody* gets out. Once it's released,

I fully intend to let people draw their own conclusions, not being attached to praise or blame, celebration or criticism. I don't care what the reactions are, only that the truth of Tim's and my experiences gets out there. Let everybody who reads it either get it and like it, or not. What they get or don't get, or like or don't like, is their trip, not mine.

One thing I've learned so far, nearly everybody wants reality to agree with their *own* preconceived perspectives. When it doesn't, very, very few expand or deepen their own viewpoint; instead, they condemn the greater view and cling desperately, often viciously, to their own narrow-minded and severely limited perceptions. Hardly anybody learns anything. They merely and almost exclusively search for views that fit their own conditioned mind — rather like the priests who condemned your philosopher father from the pulpit, instead of opening their eyes and ears and minds and learning what your father and the great visionaries he was talking about had to say. Ah, well. The dynamic remains the same. It's part of the human condition. Hence, each individual has to move forward with courage, confidence and strength without waiting for friends and companions to catch up. As Buddha once said, "Better to travel on alone, rather than with a fool for company."

The other way, which I hold in reserve, is to react selectively. When I think it's important to respond to this criticism or that distortion, then do it, rather than remain aloof, if only because an unanswered attack quite often remains in observers' minds as a truth. If the distortion or criticism is significant, and worth the energy and potential backlash, then, yes, react, even as I did with a recent idiot who gave me difficulties.

And you're right, of course, about the wounds and scars. I am reminded of the Old Testament, where Jacob wrestles with an angel the night before he has to meet his alienated brother. He wrestles with the angel all night and finally overcomes him, but in the process his hip gets thrown out of joint. Symbolically, he wins the battle, but suffers injury in the process. I guess that's what this stuff is about — conflict

creates injury, even in victory — although I would rather not be involved in conflict at all.

That, of course, is naïve. If I am going to write about controversial situations, and tell the truth as I see it without sugar-coating anything, then I automatically invite conflict, just by virtue of taking an honest stance. To think that others might say, "Gee, I never thought of it that way. Lee's really cool," is truly, deeply, and profoundly simple-minded.

No, there will be those who agree with me to begin with, and those who disagree and will never open or change their minds, and a few who will see what I am talking about, will receive what I say, think about it, and allow themselves to expand their previously limited views. It's the one's who disagree with what I say either about them or about others, and don't want to see where they are wrong and I am right, who will unpack their guns and Bowie knives. It's already happening, as with that intellectual mugger I was telling you about.

So I intend to get the book out there and not look back, just go my way, straight-ahead, back to now, to the living moment I have strayed away from while being involved with the writing. So far, there is a nibble on the publishing front. I will pursue it until either somebody says Yes, or I conclude that I've tried everything and it's hopeless. No matter what happens, at least I can respect myself for having written the book and completed my obligation to Tim and the music and the lives we lived together those many years ago. It is my greatest hope now, that I can get the book out there, in the market, which will complete the final leg of the journey, the publication and sharing of the work. That's it, as far as I am concerned — the doing and the sharing. Beyond that, I'm off to new work, new life, new creations.

Thanks again for your understanding and support and enthusiastic encouragement. It truly helps. Good talking with you.

JA

To a Fellow Writer

When I came out with *Blue Melody*, I made a great mistake. I visited the Yahoo Starsailor web site to check out reactions. Second mistake: I entered into the conversations. Third mistake: I attempted to correct various factual errors some people presented, and not only that, I attempted to correct various perceptual mistakes. Some of those folks did not see Tim or his artistic evolution clearly, even though they said they read the book. Without experience or qualifications, armed only with opinions based on empty preconceptions, they not only disagreed with me, but presumed to judge me.

Because the *truth* of what I presented was unacceptable to some participants, those participants proceeded to slam ME rather than adjust their perceptions in accord with my direct personal and musical experiences. They could not, no, *would not*, learn and grow. Well, hello. This led to several horrendous fights.

Long story short: I accomplished nothing. Worse, even though I answered every attack with as much reason, compassion and patience as I could muster, the battles simply would not cease. Although I answered and "won" each argument, I came away deeply hurt. To this day, rather like an old boxer, I suffer the wounds I experienced back then. It's just not worth it. Because of cruel, ignorant critics, pianist Glenn Gould called concertizing "a blood sport" and stopped playing publicly at the age of thirty-one. Singer/songwriter Nick Drake quit playing publicly for the same reason and eventually killed himself.

Today, your editor's words of wisdom are written in stone for me: Do nothing. Don't answer. Remain silent. There is nothing as profound as silence in the face of denunciation. His words go along with Woody Allen's point of view: Don't read reviews. Positive, negative, ignore them. Move forward, and do the work.

In other words, don't look back, and keep-keep-keepin' on!

SL Source of Strength: Your Own Heart's Core

I don't know your husband J and therefore cannot speak of him. From what you have said along the way, I don't get the impression that he is particularly passionate about the same things you are, or that he pays a great deal of attention to the many things that you find interesting, or that he is vibrantly expressive about emotional matters.

But even if he is, he of course would have written your book differently. So would I. So would anybody else, because your book is your story, not theirs or his or mine. It is your story, and you handled it the only way that seemed proper to you. It is your story, told in your unique, inimitable, and absolutely appropriate fashion. I don't think he meant his comments as criticism. If he did, he was failing to appreciate your individuality.

I hope you don't let his comment burst your "confidence bubble," but simply acknowledge it as a truth — everybody would write it differently, their way, not yours, even as you write it your way, not theirs — and I hope as well that you take his other suggestion to heart and send it to a publisher, if not now, then after you let your friend in Denmark read it.

There's a key point in here. You must not define yourself and your writing by other peoples' opinions of you or the work. That "confidence bubble" must be strengthened. A bubble breaks. Muscle and sinew hold. It would be nice if J could be helpful here, but if he is heavily involved in technology to the point where he's lost that deep connection with the heart, he may find himself a bit judgmental about

things that cannot be quantified, equated, or reduced to rational percepts. I don't know if that's the case.

But whatever the case, even if he understands you and deeply appreciates your every word, you are still alone when it comes to writing. All you can do is your best. You are vulnerable, true, and must become strong in order to stay open, vulnerable, and available to input and new experiences, even when it hurts. That's where the strength comes in. . . .

So your confidence is important. Your strength is important. It is hard to be open and receptive on the one hand, and to know where to stand your ground. The source of strength must lie in your own heart's core. Stand close to your own bedrock experience both as a person and as a writer.

Then, once the book is done, once it's final and out there, don't read what other people write about you. . . Go your own way. That's all you can do, really. Create beauty, give it wings, and know you have made the world a better place, because you wrote from the heart of love. Even your anger sprang from love, and all your tears and sweetest gentle memories.

The writing process is a great offering. Not everyone can do it. Those who dare to try, automatically take all of these things upon their shoulders, and should be praised to the skies for their courage and generosity and creative efforts.

SL Write Because It Needs To Be Written

I celebrate your willingness to jump back into your book and re-do that fourth chapter. Forget your husband and his callous remarks. There are certain things said

in the name of so-called "realism" that are in fact merely self-defensive and destructive.

You've got every bit as much chance as anybody else in getting your book out there. And you're absolutely right — to write it because it needs to be written, and to write it for yourself above all, is exactly the correct position.

First, do the writing. Express the content, with full attention to craft, intensity, and accuracy of expression (i.e. saying exactly what you mean, which demands clear thinking and profound patience, strength, and persistence — all of which you are admirably demonstrating). First things first: do the work.

The time to think about getting it out there is only *after* you feel satisfied with the results. At that point, the book has a life of its own.

— COMPLETION —

JS First Engage, Then Let It Be Finished

Writing is strange. You have to take a stand, do the work, and let it be finished. Otherwise, it will never get done. It goes on forever, which, of course, may be the reason one continually returns to it, diddles with it, a change here, which necessitates changes over there, ad infinitum.

In a way it's nice to never finish, as one therefore does not have to take responsibility, and, of course, it gives one something to do. However, as Thomas Wolfe eventually learned, there comes an appropriate time when you don't so much

complete a work as abandon it (with love, of course). That way, one doesn't continually remain spinning around in the same mind-zone. The mind is liberated, free to conceive and explore new zones; free to keep growing, from sculpting into music, from writing into painting, whatever. It's an open arena.

I guess it is a matter of what one values, what is important, how much time and energy is left, how much one is willing to serve one's gifts, how much responsibility one feels toward one's central, fundamental, authentic calling. Sometimes "doing stuff" is just a way to escape one's true nature. That, of course, is a question nobody else can ask or answer for us. We just have to look inside, be willing to see clearly and answer honestly, and then get on with serving the best and highest that's in us. (Unless, of course, one simply doesn't want to do that, in which case we can fritter our lives away any way we want to! Lots of folks do that. Most, in fact. It's easier.)

If one does indeed choose to give one's life in service to the best that's in them, then fear and resistance disappear the moment the decision is made. Everything falls in line. The decision itself generates energy, ideas, direction, and the whole writing process transmutes from a threat into a joyful mission, and all goes well.

When the work is completed, you will feel the truth of it. Trust that truth, set the work aside, maybe come back later. If the work is truly finished, nothing is left to be done or undone. That moment brings both a smile and a tear. As Lao Tzu once said, "Do your work, then let go." At that very instant, new life begins.

— THE NEXT STEP —

SL **Write When You Feel Like It**

It is possible that you have only this one long story in you, but it is also possible that you are feeling what every writer feels after completing a demanding work as you just did with your novel — there's nothing left: Yikes!

I suggest you don't worry about this, and don't worry about whether or not you can call yourself "a writer." Just write when you feel like it, yes? You drew the waters up out of the well. It takes time for the well to fill up again.

Ol' Norman Mailer talks about the unconscious mind, and making demands on it, not overworking it, letting it rest, treating it with respect. I agree. As Maher Baba famously said, "Do your work as well as you can, then don't worry, be happy." After a major effort, relax. Do other things. Enjoy yourself.

Me, I'm having fun just cleaning up my desk and stashing notes away in storeroom boxes and chopping wood for the woodstove! If the writing urge does not return, no guilt, no blame, no shame. If it does return, wonderful — sit down and write!

Wishing you all good things,
Keep on keepin' on,
Much luv,
Lee