

Fall 12-2002

A Teller's Tale: Joining The Circle -- A Discussion of Process in The Writing of a Novel for Young Adults

Susan A. Butler

University of Massachusetts Boston, sabip@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cct_capstone



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Butler, Susan A., "A Teller's Tale: Joining The Circle -- A Discussion of Process in The Writing of a Novel for Young Adults" (2002).
Critical and Creative Thinking Capstones Collection. Paper 38.
http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cct_capstone/38

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Critical and Creative Thinking Program at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Critical and Creative Thinking Capstones Collection by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact library.uasc@umb.edu.

A TELLER'S TALE: JOINING THE CIRCLE
A DISCUSSION OF PROCESS IN THE WRITING OF A NOVEL FOR YOUNG ADULTS

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

SUSAN A. BUTLER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2002

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

c. 2002 by Susan A. Butler
All rights reserved

A TELLER'S TALE: JOINING THE CIRCLE
A DISCUSSION OF PROCESS IN THE WRITING OF A NOVEL FOR YOUNG ADULTS

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

SUSAN A. BUTLER

Approved as to style and content by:



Peter Taylor, Associate Professor
Critical and Creative Thinking Program

Nina Greenwald, Visiting Professor
Critical and Creative Thinking Program



Mahala Beams, Professor
Pine Manor College

Peter Taylor, Associate Professor, Faculty Advisor
Critical and Creative Thinking Program

ABSTRACT

A TELLER'S TALE: JOINING THE CIRCLE A DISCUSSION OF PROCESS IN THE WRITING OF A NOVEL FOR YOUNG ADULTS

December 2002

Susan A. Butler, B.A., Radcliffe College
M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Associate Professor Peter Taylor

In this thesis, I reflect on the writing of fiction for young adults against the backdrop of autobiography. Context is provided by the accompanying opening chapters of a novel for young adults—The Defectives of Ulibar— and excerpts from a journal written during the writing process. Aspects of the creative engagement—open brainstorming, focusing, rewriting—are anchored in the specific locations—a country road, a cabin in the woods, an indoor study—in which the processes occur.

In the course of this endeavor, I learn that the writing of fiction, and the *reflecting* on the writing of fiction, are not after all so different. It is only by engaging in the groping, shape-discovering process that I learn what I have to say.

I also discover that not only do my *characters* move from silence and disconnection toward expression and connection, but that I too, through the writing of fiction, am stepping out of the shadows and joining a circle of my peers.

Lastly, I note with gratitude my membership in one other circle: the circle of fellows in the Critical and Creative Thinking community, reflective sharers of the creative journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. PREAMBLE	1
2. THE HERMIT THRUSH SINGS	3
3. STUTTERER	9
4. GRAND MARSH BAY ROAD	13
5. CABIN IN THE GLADE	16
6. COMPUTER WITH A VIEW	20
7. WOOING THE MUSE	24
8. STEPPING BACK	27
9. THOUGHTS ON THE WRITING OF THIS THESIS	30
10. THANKS	33
BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
APPENDICES	
Appendix A Opening Chapters of <u>The Defectives of Ulibar</u>	36
Appendix B Pages from a Process-Journal	76
<u>Some excerpts on creative process</u>	77
<u>Earliest pages of process-journal</u>	93

PREAMBLE

I recently picked up a copy of The Altered I: an Encounter with Science Fiction. In the introduction, Ursula Le Guin establishes the scene for a collection of science fiction vignettes—vignettes written by members of a writing workshop which she conducted over 25 years ago at a remote lodge in the Dandenong Ranges of Australia.

Her description of this distant gathering of twenty aspiring science fiction and fantasy authors filled me with an indescribable excitement. What was it, I asked myself, that I found so moving about this scenario?

This question prompted other ones: What *do* I love about fantasy? And the tangential question: What do I love about story? It occurred to me that there is little in the “real” world that I cherish as much as evidence of, or doorways into, the “unreal”.

There are many books on “How to Write.....(whatever).” I know, because I must have bought every single one of them before teaching my first writing workshop to young adults at the Boston Public Library. (Yes, I had written a book, but did I know *how* to?)

The funny thing is, as I browse my bookcases, surrounding myself with my most loved volumes on writing, none of those hammer-and-tongs How To books are among them. The books that I keep around me like old friends, the books whose words come to my tongue when I think about writing, are extraordinarily personal, almost confessional. If there are any “hows” in the equation, it is about how these authors came to write; how it feels to write; where and when they write. In many ways these texts circle around the deeper question of *why* they write.

In this reflection I will explore some of this same territory from the perspective of my own very personal experience with writing fiction. The text is accompanied by several chapters of a novel in progress, The Defectives of Ulibar, the rough beginning of a planned sequel to my

first novel for young adults (The Hermit Thrush Sings). The work-in-progress will serve as a backdrop for my exploration. It is followed, in the appendix, by excerpts from a process-journal kept throughout the writing of this second book.

Nobody could be more aware than myself of the presumptuousness of venturing into a territory already so eloquently addressed by some of the finest weavers of words in the land. But, I remind myself, each writer's terrain is, after all, unique.

As for the oddity of reflecting on the evolution of an unfinished work: I like to think that where creative process is concerned, there is as much to be learned from the prayers and imprecations of a writer whose head is still in the mouth of the dragon as from the tidy epigrams muttered by the author proudly straddling the slain beast.

THE HERMIT THRUSH SINGS

My own feeling is that the only possible reason for engaging in the hard labor of writing a novel, is that one is bothered by something one needs to understand, and can come to understand only through the characters in the imagined situation. It is not so much that one chooses a subject, as that it chooses one.¹

All of my adult life I had wanted to write.

There were promising flickers, brief temptations, but none of them quite coalesced into action: “Will I ever,,,,,,,,,” I wondered, as if any action on my part had nothing to do with it.

When it finally “happened”, it was not because I bootstrapped it.

In hindsight, it was as if several paths, or threads in my life, which had been moving steadily along on their own, finally converged.

One of those threads was my love of story.

One was my love of nature.

And one was, for want of a better way to encapsulate it, my relationship to silence.

In my childhood, story and whatever little bits of nature I thought of as the “forest” were closely linked.

First there was the land of Peter Pan, little woodland houses and hideaways. Then there was Sherwood Forest, home to Robin Hood and Little John. (No, Lady Marion never came into it). And finally, that wilderness island home of the Swiss Family Robinson.

Weekend jaunts into the woodsy hills around the city provided opportunity and location for the finding of hideaways, the establishment of named “places”, the crossing of staffs, the building of “houses”. The forest was where I could re-write my life: rewrite my “real” life into something as wonderful as my life as a dweller in fiction.

¹Sarton, May. Writings on Writing, Orono: Puckerbush Press, 1980, p. 26

I think there's a big difference between writers who find their "stuff", the dough they knead, in reality. Real moments, real people. For them, attention to the external, as well as to the internal nuances of response to that external, are critical.

For me, attention is paid to a cast of inner beings, to those little fragments of one's nature magnified, beasts slouching out of the personal (or collective?) unconscious.

But I'm getting ahead of myself

Nature, for me, was not only associated with the marvels of unreality. It was in and of itself a source of marvel. If I insulated myself from human beings, I did not distance myself from the details of growing things. Moss, ferns, seeds, unfurling leaves, the resinous smell of pine, were all miracles deserving of endless hours of attention. They fed me, inspired me, filled me with delight.

This attraction to fiction and nature were closely related to the nature of my relationship to my family, community, and the human race.

Or should I say lack of relationship. My silence was a running family joke. I don't believe I spoke unless spoken to until I was close to thirty.

It wasn't that I was scared. I certainly hadn't been abused. It wasn't until I was grown that I realized how indigenous to my nature was an assumption that I was invisible. Verging on non-existent.

It was not "a lack of self-esteem", today's trendy catchall. I was just a sort of fly-on-the-wall. A watcher. Watching all those other people who had not only eyes and ears, but bodies and voices as well.

As if they were actual characters in the plot of life, and I just a reader. They were on stage, and I in the audience. Silent because, so far as I knew, I had no speaking part.

No speaking part had been provided for me because I didn't know how to act like one of them. The way they behaved and spoke had nothing to do with the way I felt and thought. I would never have tried out for the play. None of the thoughts in my head corresponded to any of the available parts.

It was as if they were "Somewhere". And I was "Somewhere Else".

My somewhere else seemed so out of tune with what I felt others would have expected it to be that I never never never wrote it down, in a diary, as my sisters did. By the time I was in my 20's, that had changed a little: I began writing on toilet paper, so my thoughts could be flushed away from the world's eyes at a moment's notice.

Years went by. To some extent, I satisfied my love of story by photographing my children, even going so far as sequencing the photographs into book form. But a book— of the sort that I had so loved reading as a child—was still waiting to be written.

As I closed in on 50, still getting my gratification from reading rather than writing, my partner, Iso, and I received a fortuitous invitation to visit a friend in Maine. It wasn't long before I found myself prowling for property. And before you know it, ten acres of mossy woods chose me, and then chose Iso.

I took a housebuilding class, and soon enough we were building a real house in our own woods. It was the Swiss Family Robinson all over again. I would have been happy to use a few pine boughs for the roof, so Iso had to keep me on track.

It was the first time I'd been in the woods since I was a child. All that marvel was back. The cedar tree. A spider on a rose. The marsh.

Part of what finally made me write was the unsuppressable, uncontainable joy at the wonder of it.



But I think another piece had to do with finally having arrived at a point where I was ready to acknowledge that my “somewhere else” was actually a “somewhere”.

So I broke my silence. And wrote The Hermit Thrush Sings.

The setting for the book is an imaginary Maine in the future: the Nation of Maynor, a repressive, non-technological society which has grown up in the ashes of a world devastated by a meteor.

The protagonist, Leora, has been born with a webbed hand—a damning stigma in a nation intolerant of “defectives”.

Leora was deprived of her mother at birth. Her father and sister have apparently been killed by one of the vicious “birmbas”—a mutant species reminiscent of something between ape and bear. Her remaining family consists of her remarried stepmother and her stepsister.

The story follows her journey as she flees the gray walls of Village Three in search of the sister she comes to suspect may still be alive. Along the way, she is befriended by a pair of birmbas, and given refuge by a village of Latinos (the descendants of migrant blueberry-pickers, stranded generations ago by the disaster). Eventually she arrives at an island of young women rebels.

Leora, throughout, is evolving the skills of her webbed hand—a hand with which she captures the beauties of nature, with ink, or charcoal. She is also evolving her hand’s gift of prescience—its ability to depict the invisible, the future.

As Leora comes to own the power of this mysterious link to the beyond, she is also finding its (and her) role in the process of the revolution which will reconfigure Maynor’s governmental and social structure.

It was only on finishing this story that I realized how many parallels this tale held to my own life.

My own family had fled the country in 1950 in an era of political repression which had landed many close friends in jail (for their unwillingness to “name” their friends) and had put my parents’ names on a professional “blacklist.”² Leaving the United States clandestinely, one step ahead of a subpoena, we were welcomed and given a home, like Leora, in a (metropolitan) Latino “village”—Mexico City.

As for that island, its geography and topography were suggested by Little Moose Island, off the coast of Schoodic Peninsula (a fifty-yard walk at low tide). But it has other metaphoric parallels: I grew up in a family with four sisters (and, well, yes, one brother); and I have been teaching at a women’s college for over thirty years.

But speaking to “sisterhood” at perhaps a deeper level, the island of women may also embody the sense of empowerment I and others experienced through the women’s movement of the late 60’s.

As for Leora’s webbed hand, it may have been unconsciously suggested by some transient neurological symptoms which I was experiencing at the time I began the book—symptoms which included a marked weakening of my left hand. But more profoundly, the webbed hand represents that sense of “difference” which colored my childhood. And manifests, as only dreams and fiction can do, the capacity/responsibility/burden/gift of the artist to create: giving form to the visible, meaning to the incomprehensible, and shape to chaos.

² My mother, Jean Rouverol, chronicles this experience in a recently released memoir, Refugees from Hollywood: a journal of the blacklist years. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000.

As first novels go, the book enjoyed what might be termed modest success.³ My most prized acknowledgment, because it was bestowed on me by my beloved Maine, was the Lupine Honor Award.

The hermit thrush had not only sung, but been heard.

I had come a long way from writing on toilet paper.

But what next?

³ The Hermit Thrush Sings (1999) was published by DK Publishing, Inc. It was issued in paperback by Dell Laurel-Leaf; and in audio by Recorded Books. The book was picked up by the Junior Library Guild for its subscription list; was named one of the year's 'Ten Best First Novels' by Publisher's Weekly; was put on the N.Y. Public Library Teen Age List, 2000; and received one of two Lupine Honor Awards given in 1999.

STUTTERER

*The fruitful idea may well spring from something seen out of the corner of an eye, perhaps a place, perhaps a person, perhaps a situation suggested by an overheard remark—the seed may lie dormant a long time, but little by little it magnetizes the imagination. It begins to haunt. I might add that the seed of an idea for a novel seems to take a considerable time to germinate. What does "haunting" imply in this context? That the idea has slipped down into the layers of the unconscious where it is fertilized by some unexplored but actual experience of one's own which "wants out"?*⁴ May Sarton

You might say the second book was conceived while I was still "nursing" the first one. I know this for sure because somewhere near the end of *Hermit Thrush*, Leora draws a picture of the Institute, which also includes an image of Jem, and a boy with "no name".

The seed for the character of the boy with no name had been planted years earlier by a TV program, which featured an interview with a high school student. I don't remember the precise details, but it went something like this: Due to a problem of neurology or physiology, he had always had difficulty speaking. His speech was garbled and halting, he sat in the back of class, avoiding eye contact with everyone including the teachers. The problem was pronounced enough to have given him a reputation, at least among his peers, of being somewhat retarded. His teachers could not have been far behind, because they were as amazed as anyone else when this oafish senior scored 800's in all of his SAT's, winning him a full scholarship to MIT (or was it Cal Tech?), along with a human-interest spot on a television talk show.

I wish I had recorded the exact story. But no matter. What I filed away in my mind was an imagined version of this boy's life experience. I was, after all, busy writing a story whose social landscape included the specter of an Institute for "defectives". When the time came, the fictitious version of this young man was already waiting in the wings.⁵

⁴Sarton, May. *Writings on Writing*, p. 26

⁵ I consulted two books for supportive ideas and information. One, by Marty Jezer, was *Stuttering: A Life Bound up in Words* (Basic Books, 1997), a memoir of Jezer's childhood as a stutterer. The other, by Peter C. Holloran, was *Boston's Wayward Children: Social Services for Homeless Children 1830-1930* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997) chronicling, among other things, the conditions in orphanages during this period.

I had apparently already made the decision at the conclusion of the first book to call him “creature”. Why else would Leora refer him to as a boy with no name? The fact that I would no longer be able to call my semi-mute character Ivan or Max or whatever was only the first of the corners which I would find that I had written myself into. I had also, after all, promised that Leora, accompanied by Cassie and Howie, would “liberate the Institute”.

It was logical to assume that my heroine would stay central to the plot. But just as I had finally written a book, Leora herself had emerged from silence. She had “done her thing”. Although I certainly had the *option* of continuing the story as Leora’s saga, it wasn’t a choice, which interested me.

It didn’t take long to discover that by putting a “hook” on the end of the first book, I had laid a virtual minefield of interlocking challenges for the writing of the second. The most troubling and central of these was to write a book that included my prior central characters, but not *as* central characters. To write a coherent integral story of a new protagonist in a set of circumstances, (including characters and even mythical beasts), which had been invented as the vehicles for the evolution of a different protagonist! For me, the purpose of a story is to allow a character to become who he or she *is*. To begin growing, to use James Hillman’s metaphor, from acorn to oak.⁶ Creature has been in the Institute—the dumping ground for Maynor’s defectives and delinquent children—for as long as he can remember. His early stuttering has been exacerbated by teasing and beatings, so that his attempts at speech now produce no more than a tortured, mouth-frothing, series of grunts. This has earned him his name—from those now around him who assume, (as he puts it in his journal), that his head is as empty as “a mealbowl”.

⁶ Hillman, James. The Soul’s Code. New York: Random House, 1996.

So who is Creature as acorn; and who as oak?

As acorn, Creature is a lover of language. Just as Leora longed for the physical beauty of nature, Creature longs for new words, for books. And just as in the process of transformation into oak Leora's prophetic visions contribute to the success of the revolution and the reconnection of villages, so, Creature's growing store of knowledge and poetic gift of persuasion will help to bridge the gap which separates the different domains of knowledge.

On the surface of it, there are fewer autobiographical parallels here than in the previous book. But the psychological parallels are there. If anything, they have been magnified.

Even more than Leora, Creature is a *prisoner* of his difference (a prisoner both literally and figuratively). Even more than for Leora, the consequence of his difference is silence. And the consequence of his silence is isolation. Like Leora, he will go from being the *victim* of his difference, to shaping his challenge into the very gift with which he can *make* a difference.

There is a special challenge inherent in the telling of this story. In the earlier book, it had taken no great skill on my own part to convince a reader that Leora was coming into relationship with her creative visual gift. The story was in no way dependent on a demonstration of my (nonexistent) drawing skills. But to portray Creature's developing relationship to speech—particularly *in his own words*—the writing would have to reflect his relationship to *language itself*. Moreover, with his discovery of a pile of books in the attic, would come the added demand of showing—through the evolution of his style and vocabulary—the effects of *reading*.

In the first book I was using words to tell a story of creative manifestation. In the second, I am using words to tell a story about using words (in the process of creative

For Creature, the symbolic enemy is the hangman, tightening the imagined noose, choking off speech at its source. My own “hangman” is not very different, and is quite as effective. My own hangman reminds me that I began writing late in life. Tells me that I am mentally poorly equipped; superficial; inarticulate; emotionally resistant. Lacking the “stuff” of a real writer; lacking the skills of the craft. And much too old to learn to ride a bike.⁷

I have no illusions about being up to the task. But the only antidote to fear that I know of is putting one foot in front of the next and walking the walk. My hope is that my imagination’s growing familiarity with how it feels to be in Creature’s shoes, will allow me, by the time I hit the umpteenth draft, to let Creature speak as only Creature *would* speak.

⁷ Mary Gordon’s version of the hangman: “But who is the wolf? He is strangers. He is the risk of one’s own judgments.” (“The Parable of the Cave or: In Praise of Watercolors” in The Writer on her Work (pp. 27-32), ed Janet Sternburg. N.Y.: WW Norton & Co., 1980, p. 32)

GRAND MARSH BAY ROAD

*One asks oneself then whether it is possible to come upon this thing without inviting, without waiting, without seeking or exploring—just for it to happen like a cool breeze that comes in when you leave the window open? You cannot invite the wind but you must leave the window open....*⁸ J. Krishnamurti

*This book is like a bush; it grows from a single root, many branches, many leaves and twigs, but all the same plant. Many resemblances, as one branch and its leaves look like another, except when you look closely. But there the whole thing is: structure and foliage. And there is a plan, which was gradually disclosed to me as I wrote.*⁹
M.C. Richards

When I was young, I would sometimes see my father, as he wrestled with story-issues in a screenplay, pacing like a lion in a small cage.

Pacing, for me too, works. It is especially good for my favorite stage of the story-making process—the stage at which the broad architecture of the story is conceived. Personally I prefer a longer stretch for pacing, and for want of a “dream” study, (which would have at least twenty feet of unobstructed prowling length), I have taken to the road.

The road in question is Grand Marsh Bay Road, at the head of the driveway of our house in the woods of Maine. It used to be dirt, but has recently been paved. The only advantage of the pavement is that the rare automobile raises no dust. Putting on my shoes after breakfast in the mornings and heading up to the road is my first daily act of engagement with my writing.

Importantly, the morning walk carries no commitment. I travel light, with a notebook small enough to fit into my pants pocket—just *in case* some twist of plot, or character, or underlying concept—should pop into my mind.

The lack of commitment is important. Because only when I’m smelling the mix of fir tree and rain, or listening to the hermit thrush—only when I’m looking the other way—am I

⁸Krishnamurti, J. *Freedom from the Known*, NY & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969, p. 122

⁹ Richards, Mary Caroline. *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1962, p. 5



visited by those surprising artifacts from that foundry in the subconscious, welded together from bits of the past, bits of the present, and bits of things that never were.

It is important to jot them down. Because I will otherwise forget them just as surely as one forgets a dream when one reenters waking time. It was here on the road where the birmbas wandered onto my path, and where Rooney leaped down from the wall. It was here where I realized that the Institute was once a public library, and that a hangman haunted Creature's inner world.

Walking seems to keep my mind loose. The ideas that are thrown up to me do not tend to congeal as they do when I sit at the computer. Grand Marsh Bay Road is not the place where words seal meanings into irrevocable factual nuggets. Images exist here in fluid layers, make chance encounters. Equally likely here is the possibility that threads woven too firmly together will *unravel*, clearing the way for a new warp or a new weft.

There is also something about walking that encourages that apt and surprising association of words into metaphor. Often the metaphors are about the creative process itself. And these too I have gotten into the habit of jotting down. In fact it is mostly here that I reflect on the creative process itself. (see appendix for excerpts from these notes)

Where do the characters come from that I meet on the road? Partly, as I've already suggested, from bits of unresolved biographical material, and what the subconscious has done with them. But partly from the needs of the story. "I need someone here who would..." or "How could my character get out of here without someone else who would..."

And the mind serves up a mental first draft. In answer to my question, "How do these women coerce two able bodied boys?," a character named "Keeper" came out of the woodwork. Keeper, in hindsight, looked like a drawing I had once seen—of a hefty fellow with many chins.

Quite a bit of story was woven around Keeper. But at some point, I realized that of five characters on stage, three were inarticulate. Feeling disinclined to give Keeper a speaking part, I eliminated him from the story. But he is still in the wings. Having paid him a visit as I write this, I can say he is a gentler beast than I had originally conceived of.

It occurs to me that just as Rooney parallels Wiggala, Keeper, if he had stayed in the story, was going to play a role similar to that of the birmbas— apparently brutal, but gentle at heart. Who knows. Before all is said and done, he just may find himself back in the play. I will find that out when I put on my sneakers and hit the road next summer.

CABIN IN THE GLADE

*The experience of being possessed is a common one for writers, surely. The sense of everything being lined up. The tower of light. Also the sense of being caught up. What I associate quite literally with the Yeats poem "Leda and the Swan." The great bird seizes you in its claws. Afterwards a sense of looseness, exhaustion, a feeling in the chest as if I had run a long way.*¹⁰ Marge Piercy

*The creative process is a continual alternation between what is given and what is made of the gift.*¹¹ May Sarton

When the time comes to assess critically the thoughts which have so often come to me on the road, or to begin the actual writing of a chapter, I do so firmly seated, with a large writing pad on my lap, and a pen in hand.

"Where" I do this is in a 10' by 14' cabin, well away from the distractions of my living area. It is strategically placed in a glade so that the open wall views frame, to my photographer's eye, perfect compositions: of the rhythmic relationship of several large maples in front; of a half living, half dead, lightning struck birch to the side; and of a host of alders at the base of the hill to my back.

Just beyond the maples, at the environmentally-requisite 250 feet, lies Grand Marsh, with its lush grasses, reflective ponds, shrubby island mounds, as well as its inhabitants—geese, heron, and the occasional moose.

This placement near the marsh seems particularly apt. One of my favorite quotes about the creative state is Arthur Koestler's:

The most fertile region seems to be the marshy shore, the borderland between sleep and full awakening—where matrices of disciplined thought are already operating but have not yet sufficiently hardened to obstruct the dreamlike fluidity of imagination.¹²

¹⁰Piercy, Marge. in Ariadne's Thread: A Collection of Contemporary Women's Journals (pp.58-60). ed. Lyn Lifshin, NY: Harper & Row, 1982, p. 60

¹¹Sarton, May. Writings on Writing.

¹²Koestler, Arthur. The Act of Creation. London: Arkana, 1964, p. 210



In actual fact, the place where I constructed this little writing house is where I originally had my heart set on building our “real” summerhouse. Iso disagreed, and I lost the argument. But in hindsight, I am grateful to have left the glade and its carpet of tender ferns virtually undisturbed. And private.

I’ve never managed to make the cabin quite intruder-proof, and some summers have shared it with a lone bat, who bothers me not in my daytime writing hours, sleeping politely beneath the ceiling insulation till dusk.

But—back to writing.

There are two different kinds of work that take place there in my writing house in the glade.

One is deliberate and conscious engagement with issues, questions, of plot, character, setting, or even questions about personal process. But here, instead of “keeping the window open” for random ideas, I ask myself questions, often in writing, and try to answer them. Or should I say “have them answered”?

There is a delicate balance here. The rational mind can get overbearing in its service of the limited purposes of the conscious mind. In slamming the door on the chaos of the subconscious, it is shutting out its wisdom as well.

On the other hand, separate images are difficult to maneuver in the absence of words. It is often language which allows images, feelings, to come into relationship and find their place in the larger whole. The trick is to sit gently at that border between the invisible and the manifest.

There are a variety of practices which are helpful to me in that endeavor. One example of these is that of dialoguing with my characters. More specifically, it is with Creature that I have taken to having conversations. Although his persona in the book is not endowed with

limitless creative wisdom, I've learned some interesting things from him in these writing-house conversations.

Here is one example of a conversation with a "wise" Creature.

Q: What is this story about?

C: It is a story of connection.

Q: I have difficulty writing as boy.

C: All people are different faces on the same person.

Q: Why is this so much trouble?

C: You have built boxes, cages, too small for the whole.

Q: Does each person have to be whole?

C: Whole in terms of balance. And they must all add up to whole.

Q: How can I enlarge these boxes?

C: Die a little as you enter them.

The second kind of work I do in the cabin is the writing of the actual text of the book. I do not endeavor to do this unless the general direction and concept of a given chapter is completely clear to me. With the conscious work of problem solving behind me, I simply step into my characters' shoes. I become them. Whatever happens happens, and I write it down. This is not generally the stage where I fret about the "right" word. I just tell it as it comes to me. Although I have the general plan in mind, I am often surprised, interested, amused by the things the characters say and do at this point in the point in the evolution of the story.

Although this stage has been preceded by a lot of open time, a lot of concentrated wrestling, as well as a combination of the two, when this first draft of the text comes, it simply comes.

When I'm lucky, this writing happens a few days in a week. It often only produces a couple of handwritten pages. On rare occasions, a whole chapter writes itself at once. But more often it's as if only a single dance step in a vast ballet, or a simple trill in a symphony, were available to me at any one time.

By then, it is time for lunch. In case the morning's inspiration weren't already exhausted, meeting the expectations of carrying on a civil conversation will generally do it in. By early afternoon my mind is good for nothing but drone-work. If I'm ambitious, I type up my morning's thoughts into my records, adding any morning writing to the longer text. But often I'll defer typing till a chapter is done.

When a chapter is both completed and transcribed, my morning will begin not with the next chapter, but with critical reading and rewriting of the last.

COMPUTER WITH A VIEW

*A work in progress quickly becomes feral. It reverts to a wild state overnight. It is barely domesticated, a mustang on which you one day fastened a halter, but which now you cannot catch. It is a lion you cage in your study.*¹³ Annie Dillard

The place where I do my transcribing and rewriting is on the second floor of the main house, a room perched in the treetops with two walls of windows framing the swiftly changing Maine sky.

Annie Dillard, in The Writing Life, generously shared both the nitty-gritty and the ecstasy of her writing experience. But much as I admire both her writing and her candor, I will never understand her preference for a cinderblock room, taped-down blinds, and electrical lighting as preconditions for the actual work of writing. The only thing I'm capable of envying as much as a given writer's skill with the craft, is the beauty of the locale in which he/she practices it.

But, back to my computer room. To be strictly honest, it is our bedroom. But it is where my computer lives, and it is the place I go when I have been abandoned either by my wits or by the muse, but am unready to throw in the towel for the day. Transcription is boring, but soothing in its low level of expectation.

This room is also the place where I do my critical reading, sitting with a freshly printed sheaf of work upon the completion of a new chapter.

One of the things I learned from my marvelous editor, Melanie Kroupa, is that in writing, less is more. I learned it well. It is unusual, at this reading stage, that words are added. Deletion is more likely—of words, sentences, paragraphs.

¹³Dillard, Annie. The Writing Life. N.Y. : Harper & Row, 1989



This is also the point at which words are weighed for precision, sentences and paragraphs for rhythm, chapters for thrust.

Although one might think of rewriting as very “left brain,” critical, focused work, it also involves fine-tuning of one’s intuition. In many ways this critical work is as non-verbal as, say, looking at art or listening to music. It is as much about balance, rhythm, chiaroscuro, volume, as it is about language.

The collection of small tasks in minor text assessment are generally stress-free, providing a fairly pleasant pastime. But critical reading can also yield up more alarming realizations.

To quote from a biographical report I wrote in my first CCT course many years ago.:

I learned a lot from Dillard regarding process itself. For Dillard, process and form are closely allied. She has a writing, sifting, discarding, editing process which is endlessly fluid, and honors unexpected emergent themes and sub-themes. She respects writing blocks and ‘fracture’ lines which tell her she is on the wrong track. The artist’s job is not so much to direct, as to yield.....She remains prepared at all times to throw away the very passages which were at the core of the book she thought she intended to write.

One of my favorite Dillard quotes describes perfectly the sort of uncomfortable discovery one can make in the writing process: that "...the structure has forked, so the narrative, or the logic has developed a hairline fracture that will shortly split it up the middle." ¹⁴

An example of a major editorial decision was one which came in the writing of the first book. There is a chapter on the island which I had not really intended to write in the first place, but somehow “appeared”. In this chapter, Leora befriends a wild goat which has lost its young. Leora milks the goat, winning the gratitude not only of the goat, but also of the island’s always-hungry young rebels, who had heretofore been regarding her with a jaundiced eye.

¹⁴Ibid.

For me, it was an important chapter, having, I suppose, to do with everything which mother's milk symbolizes. But a number of the friends and relatives I rely on for critical advice felt that the chapter slowed the narrative down, and was not critical to the broader sweep of the story.

So this was an instance where I put a "halter" back on my wild "mustang": I cut the runaway chapter out. Though to this day, I feel that the milking of the goat "really happened" in that world, and the "event" holds a special place in my heart.

In the case of The Defectives of Ulibar, the most problematical critical decision has been around the question of point of view. This issue is partly the product of the combined presence of a new as well as an old protagonist. Although the current version is written from Creature's point of view in the first person, much of the book was written earlier through his eyes in the *third* person. And with yet another plan in mind, a number of chapters were written through the eyes of Jem and of Leora, also in the third person.

Each of the varying options in terms of point of view goes hand-in-hand with a different thematic and structural thrust to the story. My decision to go with the first person "journal" approach was made with the help of friend whose ear for story and prose I respect.

I am lucky, when it comes to friends and relatives, to have on tap two "expert" sources of critique.

My mother has written screenplays, soap operas, biographies for young adults, and has an impeccable eye for plot. And my brother is a screenwriter. It was his suggestion that Leora's webbed hand have some water-related plot implications. The details of Leora's watery rescue of her sister were somehow hatched with the help of my children (two of my other reliable critics) who were visiting one morning for brunch.

I often wonder whether writers of non-fiction—who are not at the mercy of elements of character and plot—are so dependent upon, or so benefit from, the critical response of an early surrogate audience.

WOOING THE MUSE

These are places which I, as an artist, claim for my own. Allowing my attention to creep ever so gradually further into the territory of the preconscious, to surprise the creatures of my imagination in their fetal stages. Susan Butler, from process-journal for The Defectives of Ulibar

I have spoken of these phases of fiction-writing—open brainstorming, focusing, text writing, and rewriting—as if they were quite distinct. In fact there is a quality of mind which is central to all of them—one which combines the apparent opposites of openness and focus.

I often think of the creative process in terms of a “topography” of mind. I envision myself sitting very still at the edge of a body of smooth water, waiting as patiently as a fisherwoman for something to surface from the deep.

When it does, I try to maintain an attentive watching mind in order to net the wondrous fish intact. My overzealous mental wordsmith, in its need for domination, will otherwise leave the poor facsimile of the fish gutted and filleted at the water’s edge.

One must sit lightly at that border between perception and expression.

Another way of conceiving this duality of the creative mind is as a “bridge”. A bridge between openiess and focus; between words and sensory experience; between the creative and the critical; the conscious and the preconscious.

I confess that I do not literally envision a bridge when I think of these. But oddly, built into our very brain, and playing a significant role in these delicate interchanges, is something quite like a bridge: the corpus callosum, which sits at the junction between the left and right hemispheres, and provides a conduit between these vital centers of activity. It is not yet clear whether creative activity is helped by a simultaneous synchronious functioning of both sides of the brain, or through a rapid alternation of dominance, but it is certain that we have the corpus

callosum to thank for their cooperation. (In Europe, there is a class of drugs in use which enhance the functioning of the corpus callosum. Not surprisingly, it is favored by artists!)

So long as we are discussing the brain, it is worth mentioning another aspect of cerebral function of import to the artist, (as well as a subject of infinite personal fascination) which is the role played by different brainwaves in the creative process.

Kenneth Pelletier referred to "...findings that associate *theta prominence* with... episodes of unusual creativity among artists, writers, and musicians... and... deep states of Zen Meditation."¹⁵ (itals. mine)

Elmer and Alyce Green, early biofeedback pioneers, were the first to explore theta-feedback. (I oversimplify here. Indeed it takes a cooperation of a variety of brainwave levels to bring creative insight to fruition.)¹⁶ This realm of technological control of mind-states has since blossomed into a fascinating field, besting the wildest dreams of the science fiction writers of the time of the Green's early experiments.

Although I have indeed explored some of this technology, I will settle here for mentioning the importance of meditation to me in achieving that open-but-attentive state so conducive to creative work. While Insight Meditation (vipassana) is my spiritual practice, and contributes both directly and indirectly to my writing, I have also evolved my own more goal-oriented versions of creative visualization.

¹⁵ Pelletier, Kenneth R. Toward a Science of Consciousness, NY: Delta, 1978, p. 164

¹⁶ Pelletier: "Nevertheless, in light of this research it is possible to posit a continuum of consciousness based upon neurological indices of attention focus. Beta...has been characterized as externally focused attention, alpha activity...as a threshold state of passive volition, or relative receptivity, while theta rhythms ...seem to be indicative of a conscious, internal focus upon intrapsychic processes. The unique interface of conscious-unconscious processes occurring within the alpha/theta segment of the continuum seems to offer significant creative potential to the individual subject. In this interface state, an individual appears to be able to use his conscious mind to focus upon unconscious imagery in a paradoxical manner resembling controlled free association. The ability to focus on unconscious processes allows an individual to formulate more creative problem solutions--taking advantage of previously unavailable information from his subconscious mind." (Ibid. p. 170)

One of the things I find fostered by meditation is the emergence of metaphor. Metaphor might be thought of as the bridge of all bridges. Seen from a variety of perspectives, it was the topic of much of my work in the Critical and Creative Thinking Program at the University of Massachusetts. At its most powerful, metaphor provides a multilayered association of similarity and difference that ripples outward in the mind, reconfiguring (like fiction) everything in its wake.

Interestingly, as I mentally itemize my preconditions and preferences for creating fiction, I find that they are not very different from those three elements I mentioned in the opening pages of this reflection: nature, story, and silence.

There is no doubt that the beauty of nature does something for the creative mind. I have already noted in my own past the connection between nature and fantasy. But since the desire for beautiful surroundings for creative pursuits seems to be shared by many, I can only speculate on the generally beneficial effects of natural beauty on the soul.

As for my early love of story, it of course continues. When I'm writing, however, it seems particularly important to me to read—specifically fantasy, science fiction, and fiction for young adults. Although I often feel guilty when I take a break from my writing for a trip to the library and a day of reading, it seems to provide me with a vital form of “nourishment”.

And lastly, silence—or should I call it solitude—gives me the freedom from distraction which is apparently necessary for that prolonged open-but-attentive engagement with the private underworld from which the shape of story will emerge.

In choosing particular locales, conditions, and working practices, and in “haunting” that place between worlds, I think of myself as “courting” that fertile state of mind. Indeed, of wooing the muse.

STEPPING BACK

*Characters, if they are alive at all, prove to have an existence of their own, insist on breaking out of too arbitrary formulations. A character may change the whole tone of a novel by its intrusion by its radical thrust up from the subconscious. This can be very disturbing, but it is surely a sign of life...; the novel is beginning to exert its influence on its maker.*¹⁷ May Sarton

Many authors, in the process of writing, are creating characters who are little pieces of themselves, and giving them the opportunity of meeting challenges which are their own. So it should come as no surprise that the central characters of both of my books move from silence and disconnection, to expression and connection. Both books are about characters who, by manifesting their creative and expressive potential, become members, even “architects”, of the their communities.

But in my own case, there is a curious additional dimension. The act of writing *itself* allows me, forces me, like my characters, to step out of that shadowed world of silence in which I had spent the first half of my life.

And I, in this process of telling *their* story, have found that I have been heard, and responded to, by a very real audience. Without any other action on my own part, I have been invited to do author’s visits at a dozen different middle schools; to do a young writer’s workshop at the Boston Public Library; and to do a three-day author’s visits at a middle school in Winthrop Maine.

This late-spring author’s visit in Winthrop was one of the more remarkable consequences of the publication of The Hermit Thrush Sings. The book had been selected as the focus of the entire middle school’s year-long multi-disciplinary study. I was honored, touched, and amazed to see the work of these young students. Each of the sixth grade students had created a book of drawings, illustrating the high points of the plot. (Leora would have been pleased!) The seventh

grade students had designed boardgames around the story. And the eighth grade had designed and created puppets of the book's various characters. An impressive collection of young talent!

Most of the reviews provided a mix of criticism and praise, but were generally "warm". The book received a number of acknowledgments in this "adult" world. My young adult reviewers, on Amazon.com, verged on the wildly enthusiastic.

I suppose what I'm coming to understand is that I have now stepped out of the shadows. In my mind is an image of a woman stepping out from the forest and joining hands with a circle of others

I do believe that my deep deep preference for silence could only have been cracked, wedged open, superseded, by my desire to share this word-dependent creation with the world.

Or: was it the other way around—that my deepest desire was to share from my depths with the world? And only this core archtypical story was personal enough to do the job.

A further question is suggested by Sarton's quote above. Did I create Creature? Or has he created me?

I referred earlier to Hillman's metaphor of acorn and oak.

I want us to envision that what children go through has to do with finding a place in the world for their specific calling. They are trying to live two lives at once, the one they were born with and the one of the place and among the people they were born into. The entire image of a destiny is packed into a tiny acorn, the seed of a huge oak on small shoulders. And its call rings loud and persistent and is as demanding as any scolding voice from the surroundings. The call shows in the tantrums and obstinacies, in the shyness and retreats, that seem to set the child against our world but that may be protections of the world it comes with and comes from.¹⁸

¹⁷Sarton, May. *Writings on Writing*. p 35

¹⁸Hillman, James. *The Soul's Code*. New York: Random House, 1996, p. 13

Perhaps the answer to the question I asked at the opening of this reflection—as to what I love about fantasy, and what I love about story—is not a rational one.

Fantasy is the humus that nourishes my roots. And story is the fruit that I bear.

If I were to ask James Hillman why that is so, he might answer that it is what I was born to do.

THOUGHTS ON THE WRITING OF THIS THESIS

But the scenes as they unfold are set on the curve of the whole book, a slowly rising wave which will break at the climax and resolve itself in the synthesis of the end. ¹⁹ May Sarton

It seems that I am one who writes in order to learn what I think, groping for language not just to communicate what I know, but to make manifest to myself those shapeless and mysterious forms from the deep. By clothing those “somethings” in words, giving form to the formless. And then trying to find, as in photography, a vantage point from which that shifting panoply of separate elements fall into simple, elegant relationship.

Just as I go through a process of opening, focusing, exploring, fishing for meaning, and cutting the line, in my fiction writing, so too the process of distilling my experience for this exposition has been a creative one.

As I think about it now, the *word* in my mind is “wrestling” (which should give me a hint that I have been trying too hard), but the *image* in my mind is of the sculptor, chipping away at the stone, trying to remove everything which isn’t the....the what?

What a blind and groping process, this chipping away with no idea of what unique beast wants to emerge. It is the shape-maker in me.

My daughter, who is a crafter of highly whimsical (and often humorously “inconvenient”) studio furniture, says that she knows that her brainstorming process is complete, that she has gone as far as she can go, when she is laughing so hard that tears roll down her face.

For me, I know that a piece of writing is conceptually complete when the ending meets up with the beginning. Not when the straight line gets from A to Z, but when it has shaped itself into a full circle. When my last paragraph clarifies my first.

This time it has been no different.

I began this essay with some thoughts about a writer's conference. Although clearly something had compelled me to do so, rationally it seemed both random and whimsical. I happened to have read about this particular workshop in the same week that I was beginning this "exploration", and somehow it "showed up" in my first paragraph.

Only as I reach the conclusion of this process, do I finally understand the power, for me, of that scenario described by Ursula Le Guin—of people gathered, sharing their fantasy worlds with each other. Breaking their silence—together. Crafting the private invisible into the public visible—with each other's support (I want to say collusion).

Through the writing of this reflection, I have come to understand that in telling a story which is so particularly dependent on *skill* with the writing craft, I am daring to think not only of sharing a yarn with a circle of children, but of joining a circle of my peers.

Perhaps even more startling to me has been the experience of glimpsing the essence of the child I was. The "acorn". Peering back through time, I have seen myself as if through the eyes of another: a silent watcher, studying the mysterious possibilities that lay hidden beneath the visible reality of which everyone else seemed a part.

I have also glimpsed myself becoming "oak": using the craft of language and the artist's taste for shape-making to transfigure that old and private world of imagination into tales to be told in a very real and public world. Using the wheel of fantasy to spin the very stuff of my differences into sharable lore.

But oh please let me not leave the impression that in taking my place in the real world I have abandoned my old terrain.

¹⁹ Sarton, May. Writings on Writing

While by day I may indeed be joining the human circle as a storyteller, by night I will continue to haunt that borderland at the edge of the marshy shore of consciousness—forever an orphan in a mysterious land of angels and beasts.

THANKS

*The power of the golden section to create harmony arises from its unique capacity to unite different parts of a whole so that each preserves its own identity, and yet blends into the greater pattern of a single whole.*²⁰ Gyorgy Doczi

*'A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labours of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.'*²¹ Albert Einstein

I have spoken about how Leora and Creature break their silence, and through their creative contributions, take their place in their communities.

I have also observed that I, as a writer, have broken my silence and have joined community as a storyteller.

But there is of course a third layer to this. In which I, as a student of creativity, have stepped back to get perspective on this very experience. And like Leora and Creature, and like the *fiction writer* Susan Butler, I have looked for form and meaning to share with you, the fellows of my other circle, the CCT community.

We are explorers of the creative way—daring to experience, decipher, or intuit what Hillman would refer to as “...very large ideas such as beauty, mystery, and myth,” as well as “romantic challenge”, “vision”, and “calling.”²²

I take this opportunity to thank you all. This program provided the catalyst for the writing of my first book. This program brought me back to reflect on the process. It has given me both the model and the reality of a community of learning. And provided me, as a teacher, with invaluable pedagogical tools.

²⁰ Doczi, Gyorgy *The Power of Limits*. Boston & London: Shambhala, 1985

²¹ Ibid. p. 29

²² Hillman, James. *The Soul's Code*. New York: Random House, 1996, p. 5-6

It has also provided me with the companionship of travelling fellows more diverse, interesting and inspiring than any writer of fiction might have invented.

Incredibly, the experience has demonstrated, even to me, that creative difference has a place and a role in shared vision. And that shared vision can support creative difference.

I have learned, as Ursula Le Guin puts it, that art is, “a skillful and powerful way of being in the world in the world.”²³

²³ Le Guin, Ursula. *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, NY: Harper & Row, 1989, p. 154

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Butler, Susan. The Hermit Thrush Sings. New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 1999.
- Dillard, Annie. The Writing Life. N.Y. : Harper & Row, 1989.
- Doczi, Gyorgy. The Power of Limits. Boston & London: Shambhala, 1985.
- Gordon, Mary. "The Parable of the Cave or: In Praise of Watercolors" in The Writer on her Work (pp. 27-32), ed. Janet Sternburg. N.Y.: WW Norton & Co., 1980.
- Hillman, James. The Soul's Code. New York: Random House, 1996.
- Holloran, Peter C. Boston's Wayward Children: Social Services for Homeless Children 1830-1930 Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997.
- Jezer, Marty. Stuttering: A Life Bound up in Words, Basic Books, 1997.
- Koestler, Arthur. The Act of Creation. London: Arkana, 1964.
- Krishnamurti, J. Freedom from the Known, NY & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969.
- Le Guin, Ursula. Dancing at the Edge of the World, NY: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Pelletier, Kenneth R. Toward a Science of Consciousness, NY: Delta, 1978.
- Piercy, Marge. in Ariadne's Thread: A Collection of Contemporary Women's Journals (pp. 58-60), ed. Lyn Lifshin, NY: Harper & Row, 1982.
- Richards, Mary Caroline. Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1962.
- Rouverol, Jean. Refugees from Hollywood: a journal of the blacklist years. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000.
- Sarton, May. Writings on Writing, Orono: Puckerbush Press, 1980.

APPENDIX A

OPENING CHAPTERS OF
THE DEFECTIVES OF ULIBAR

(Prelude)*

"Show them your new drawing, Leora," whispered Yano.

All eyes were upon her.

She turned over an ivory page from the table before her, and smoothed it out on the center of the table.

Everyone stood to get a better view.

In rich black ink, the flowing lines showed a boat with three people in it, and a sailful of wind, traveling between two shores.

"It's the shores of the Nob River," Reba said, recognizing the topography from the earlier drawing.

"And the bonniest boat I'll ever see," said Howie, looking lovingly at the lines of the vessel.

"This is you, Howie," Leora said, pointing at one of the three figures. "And this is you, Cassie, with your staff in the air. And this is me." In the picture, her own hand was into the wind, its web clearly defined.

On the northern shore, enlarged out of all proportion, was a building which she recognized as the Town Hall. Here, a figure she knew to be Reba's addressed a peaceful crowd.

* (This prelude is taken directly from near the end of The Hermit Thrush Sings)

On the southern shore stood a larger grim structure of stone, a cloud of darkness enveloping it. "The Institute," whispered Cassie.

Standing out from the other figures in the dark structure were the forms of two boys.

"This one," said Leora. "His name is Jem."

"That's my brother's name!" said Cassie.

"At least we know he's alive and well," interjected Reba.

"And this one," Leora went on, "why.....he has no name!"

"Well, Leora," said Reba, "I'm sure you'll find it out if anyone can."

"When we liberate the Institute?" said Cassie, a new note of hope in her voice.

"Yes," said Leora. "When we liberate the Institute."

WRITING BOOK

I got this book of blank pages this morning. It won't be missed.

The Matron had me carry an armload of these to the other side of the Institute.

The good side. Where the Knowers work.

I live on the bad side, where Maynor keeps its Abnormals—Abs, for short. Also a few Normals—or Norms—who end up here for weird different reasons. Like being an orphan. Or for your family doing something against the Rulers.

Matron never would have taken any of the others to the Knowers' side. Others might have seen things and told things. She only took me there because she thinks me witless. That I don't understand words, and that I don't talk.

She's half right. I don't talk.

I don't know how old I was when I came here. But as I got older, every word I spoke got stuck on my tongue. Stuttering, they call it. They beat me and put me in the smallbox to make me stop. It got worse. Finally all I could do was grunt. Like a creature. So that's what they call me. Creature.

Matrons have come and gone since then. No one here knows I could ever talk. As far as they know, my head's empty as a mealbowl.

Secretly, I talk to birds. And mice. I never had any trouble talking to things that couldn't understand anyway.

But I'm careful they don't hear me.

Being witless is like being nobody.

They can't hurt you if you're nobody.

Besides that, even the slavers don't want you.

And tomorrow is slaving day.

Buyers have no use for idiots. Though if any of the matrons thought I was a complete idiot, they'd have sent me out of here in a gunny sack long ago. As it is, they've learned that if they show me what to do, I can do it. Cleaning. Twining. Breaking rock. I have two hands, and ten fingers, which is better than lots of the Abs. I'm strong, I'm useful, I never get sick. So year after year, they find a way to keep me.

All the rest of the Abs will get taken tomorrow. Of the two Normals, Wip, the sickly one, they'll let go. The other one, Jem, they'll keep. Matron and Sister will hide him from the slavers in the basement, like they always do. Jem's useful, like me. I never knew why he ended up here. Norms don't talk to Abs. And even Abs don't talk to me.

But I do listen. With people thinking I'm no smarter than a doorknob, they say things in front of me.

Like just yesterday.

First, I heard Jem telling the other Normal, Wip, that tomorrow when the slavers get here, he'll run out from the basement and get taken. Later, I heard Wip telling Matron every word Jem had said.

Each Matron has her spies.

Jem can be mean sometimes. Well, not really mean. Just angry. Always angry. Once one of the slavers, for a joke, put fire to a string on a ball of wrapped gunpowder. The noise it made was just like the sound of the word. 'Firecracker'. That's Jem. Once the string's lit, there's no stopping him. He goes off. And ends up in the smallbox.

One thing I will always be thankful to Jem for. He taught me to read. Well, really, he wasn't teaching me. He was teaching a little girl, a Norm, who was here a long time ago. I watched and listened.

Writing—I taught it to myself. By tracing over the letters of a little book I found in the wall. The book is called County Annual Report. I know it's from the Before Time, because it says 'State of Maine'. Which is what Maynor was called before the Disaster. They say the Institute is one of the only things left from the fires that burned up the world after the Disaster. Books like the one I found, that escaped from burning, they're forbidden.

I have traced over the words of that book so many times I could write the whole thing down right here without even looking at it. I will try to print just as small here to make these pages last a long time

Every day I will put what happens. When the book is full, I will hide it behind the wall. If you are reading this, whoever you are, you will have found it there. All black with dust, just like I found the Annual Report.

Maybe by then, the Institute will be gone.

No.

The Institute will be forever.

If you have found this, and are reading it, you are an Ab just like me.

SLAVING DAY

-Day Two

So today was slaving day.

I never forget words. Maybe because I can never speak them, they all stay in my mind. I can tell you the exact words of every person who spoke today.

First thing today, before the slavers arrived, Matron pushed me down in the corner, away from the rest of them. "We're keeping you, dummy. Look stupid." She lolled her tongue out of her mouth and made a strangly grunty sound, so that even I would know what she meant. I knew what she meant.

The trader noticed me first off.

He said, "How 'bout that one there?"

She said, "You don't want 'im. An idiot. Can't talk. Good for nothin'."

"You're not holding out on us?"

"Look at 'im fer yerself."

I know I always look like an idiot. And today, plenty like an idiot, because I'd pulled extra hair over my face so they wouldn't see me all drippy-eyes. I don't mean I was snivly because of not getting taken. Everyone knows that it's worse out there for the Abs than in here. I mean because of Tommy. Tommy has no knees, just little stublegs that don't bend. They call him Legs. Tommy and I watched out for each other. He didn't know I knew words. But he acted like I was just as good as the rest of the Abs.. Usually I don't care about not talking. But today I wanted to say good-bye to Tommy.

If I'd tried, it would have come out "G...G...G..", and made my face red, and my eyes stick out, and bubblyspit would come out of my mouth, like I was a mad dōg. He would have been scared to death

Anyway, the trader came over and gave me a kick, like that could tell him something. I didn't blink a hair.

"So put him down," he said.

'Putting down' means killing, when you're talking about Abs and animals.

"Prob'ly will," Matron said.

Matron has a red face, and flaky skin. Usually her yellowy hair is greasy-dark, in a knot. But today it was clean and brushed out. She hardly took her eyes off the tall trader, and she smiled a lot. When she shows her teeth, she looks a little scary.

Matron's sister—she's just called Sister—she stood there with her back against the wall, straight as a pole, like always, with her lips pinched like a dry apple. You could tell she didn't like the way the men looked so cheeryface. And she didn't like the way Matron looked at the man.

(Herding them, etc)(He sang just to annoy her —[Later words of song, and later? smell of woods. Describe other trader)

"You know you won't be getting the next batch of Abs for a while, don't you?" the tall trader said. "Because of the bridge from the North being down."

"The bridge? The bridge up over the Nob, you mean?" Matron lit up like tinder. Excited not because she cares about the bridge, but because it was News. "When? How?" .

"Happened early fall." He lowered his voice. "Rumor goes that some villagers did it."

"Yer foolin'....!"

"It's the truth. The villagers had helped carry the troops' powder over to this side. But then they stole the powder, ran back to the other side, and blew the bridge sky high."

"No! So they'll be buildin' a new one? To go back over there and catch 'em and mash 'em?" Matron looked like she'd like to do it herself.

"Not right away."

Sister made one of her fake coughs. Everykone knew it meant that carrying news is Forbidden.

It didn't stop the trader. "All the manpower here in the South is going to be busy with trouble down the other way, at the lower South border, for a while. But you can be sure they got things under control, up over there in the North. There's governors and troops aplenty."

Sister coughed again. But not too loud. Maybe she was curious herself.

The trader went on. "Just before it happened, they'd begun cracking down on rebel activity over there. They'd rounded up all of Village 15. Had all the women-folk in jail, and they'd taken the men for munition carriers. They're the ones that blew up the bridge. But their bacon will have been fried by now, you can be sure."

"Rebel activity?" Matron said. You could see she didn't really know what that meant.

"Carrying news," Sister said, with her chin all mooched out, and not moving her lips, "is Forbidden."

The trader winked at Matron. "Whatever you say, sis."

Sister looked at him like there were hatchets in her eyes.

(Kids herded out, one last look at Tommy, etc.)

He had just said, "Well that's it then," when we all heard it.

Thump, thump, thump.

I knew what it was.

It was Jem, down in the basement. Banging his head against the door of the smallbox. The smallbox is a coffin—a child's coffin—that they put us in for punishment. I knew Jem had a gag around his mouth, or we'd have heard him yelling. He'd have started banging before, but they must have drugged him, and the drug just wore off.

That's how desperate he is, wanting to be taken by the slavers.

"There's that window loose in the wind," Matron said.

The trader looked like he didn't know if he believed her. "Just so you're not holding out any good ones on us. They need every one they can get....(Mention Where, so C can think about looking, or so it is a piece of info on social structure. Or about how much money each one is worth.) (This 'holding out' is something which they can hold over Matron's head later.)

(How it felt, everyone gone. Song, smell of the woods, and the picture in his mind of...)

The only good thing about today was that all day I could think about writing this. Maybe that's the way people feel when they have a friend to talk to. I never had one, so....

That was close. I just had to sit on this book. Jem came through. I must have been staring at the bloody corners of his mouth, where he'd fought the gag.

He said, "What are you looking at Creature? Doesn't make any difference to you, being stuck here forever."

I was surprised. He never talks to me. It's because there's nobody else left this time. I know he didn't expect me to understand him, but it makes me feel almost like somebody, him talking to me like that.

GALLOWS

Something funny's going on with Jem. The way he prowls back and forth, thinking about something that's not even here. I wonder if that last time in the smallbox, and not getting taken by the traders, if it broke him.

But it broke him different than it broke me. Instead of giving up, he went crazy. Sort of lost his mind. He's been looking at the walls like there might be something behind them. And looking out windows, like he might see something more than the same dusty yard, or the gate, or the blank wall of the Knowers' wing.

He even rubbed a place clean in the window in this room to look out of. I'm sorry he did. I could have told him there's nothing to see but the gallows, and the noose in the wind. Which is why I like the window dirty.

I only saw a man hanged there once. But that was once too many times. It was long ago, when I could still stutter my way through a sentence. (About man in mask. But I knew who it was)

After the hanging, every time I tried to talk, I felt that noose like it was around my own neck, getting tighter and tighter.

Since then I can only grunt, which is when they started calling me Creature. I know what I looked like, because they used to imitate me. I don't even try talking to Abs anymore. Sometimes I dream about talking to this one or that one, and I wake in a sweat, trying to pull that noose from my throat.

You're probably wondering why they hung a man here. The surprising thing is, it was a Knower they hung. The Knowers are the Rulers' Special Experts. The ones that live over on the

good side of the Institute, and the matrons call the Honored Guests. They study and do research over there. Matron likes to say that word, research. I don't know what it means, but I don't think she does either.

So why did they hang this Knower? It was for doing three different Forbiddens.

Number one. He was reading books from the Before Time.

Number two. He was reading things outside his own domain. 'Domain' means his special area. A Knower is only allowed to know what he's allowed to know. So let's say he was a Weapons Knower, and he was caught studying geography, or building, or bugs or something. Forbidden. Only the Rulers are allowed to know about everything.

Number three. He was talking to a Knower in a different domain. Forbidden. He's only allowed to tell the Rulers things he learns.

I'll bet it was the last one that got him caught. The other Knower must have reported him.

They said for doing all those Forbiddens, they could have hung him three times. They couldn't do that, so they let his body hang there for three days. I won't tell you what that looked like.

You would think that would make me never want to read a book from the Before Time. But it worked the other way. It was the first I heard of books from the Before Time, and I began wondering what these other books were about. I guessed they were about everything I ever wanted to know. About trees. Birds. Different places. About how things were in the Before Time. Best of all, they were filled with words, words I don't even know.

All those books I imagined—they would have stretched in a line from one end of this room to the other. (or does he live in a closet?)

And I began to wonder. Where did that Knower find those books? How many did he find? Did he find them somewhere here in the Institute? Were they buried? Or under the floors? Or behind the walls?

Now that I think of it, the way Jem has been looking at walls must be the way *I* was looking at walls then . Maybe he's not crazy. But what is he looking for?

YARD

I didn't expect the day to be this way.

At first it was like a regular day. At least regular for the way things are after the traders take everyone away. Instead of lining us up like guardsmen at the breakfast table, Matron just threw some dry biscuits on the table.

She told Jem that the traders had brought some seeds for vegetables, and for us to dig the rocks out of the dirt at the far end of the yard, to start getting it ready to plant.

"I got stuff to do, over t'other side," she said to Jem. "'T's your job to keep the Creature working. You think jus' 'cause the rest of 'ern is gone, I'm not mindin' what's happenin', think again. No work, no lunch." Her hair was in a knot again.

Outside, there were these two rusty shovels. Matron must have found them in the cellar from the last time a matron had us try to do a garden. So I already knew how useless it was. The only thing we do in that yard from one year to the next is split rock for cobblestones. So the idea of getting all the rock out of the soil would make a person laugh if it didn't make him cry. But it's all the same to me.

Personally I was glad to get out. Inside the building, you could feel the ghosts. Like the last bunch of kids were still there, but not there. Besides, after two months in the twining room, it was a relief to be under the sky.

I waited like always, till Jem showed me what to do. While he was showing me, I got a good look at his wrists, where he'd fought the ropes in the smallbox. They were missing a lot of skin. They looked like the meatchops Matron cooks for her and Sister.

After he showed me about digging and throwing the rocks aside, like I hadn't done it long before he ever got here, he started acting strange again. Looking all around at the walls, but from the outside this time.

If you're an Ab reading this, you'll already know the shape of the yard. But just in case, I'll tell how it is. Two of the walls are made by the two-story Institute building, which is L shaped. One side of the L for the Abs, the other for the Knowers. In the Abs' side, there are dirty old windows facing the yard. The Knowers only have tiny little windows, too high for them to see us or for us to see them. Their real windows, and their only door, face the other way, outwards, into the world.

The other two walls that close in the yard are plain gray granite, high as the buildings, so high you can just see sky above them. In one of them is a huge old solid iron gate. You can't see through it, except at the top is a little barred square opening, where you can see the forest outside.

That window is important, I'll tell you why later. But I was telling you about Jem. First he starts looking all around, kind of secretly, at all the windows, to make sure no one's watching him. Then he goes over to the corner, where the two parts of the building meet, and he starts looking down near the bottom of the wall. You can see there used to be windows there, into the basement, but they're so low they're all but buried with dirt and rocks and stuff. He's not interested in the one that goes into our side of the basement, the room with the smallbox. He's checking the other one, around the bend, on the Knower's part of the building.

In between looking around, nervous as a squirrel, he starts clearing away the dirt and rocks from the top of the buried window. He even puts his ear against the wall and listens. Then he finds something he doesn't want to find. The whole window is covered over with solid mortar

He just squats there, still as stone. Then he gets up real slow, comes back, and starts digging rock along side me. Every now and then, he stops and stares off. Not himself.

In fact so not himself that finally he says to me, like I would understand him, "Why can't you be someone, Creature?"

I was so surprised I almost dropped my shovel. Anyway, if I were someone, I'd have told him he should have wrapped up his wrists before he went digging around in the dirt like that. They're a mess. If they get infected bad enough, they'll bring in the butcher to chop off an arm. If both arms get infected bad enough, they won't bother. They'll just put him down.

Thinking about that made me sad for him. I started remembering how when he first came here he wasn't so hard. He was angry, but not hard. Like with that little Norm he taught to read. He treated her like a little sister. Then the traders took her, and it was like it broke his heart. After that he was only angry.

Funny, about that little girl. When I'm imagining someone reading this notebook in the future, it's someone like that little girl. I know that's crazy, pretending I'm writing to a real person.

So anyway, after Jem says 'why can't I be someone', he says, "But if you were someone, I might be tempted to trust you. "

Then he gets up, and spits, like himself.

"That's one mistake I won't make again. I wouldn't trust you if you were my own sister."

Then he said a really strange thing.

"In fact my sister's the last person I'd trust in the world." And he starts whacking away at the stones like he could make them bleed.

A lot of good it'll do. The only thing that grows here are a few scraggly weeds. It's not just the rocks. With the high walls, the only thing that gets enough sun to grow is the gallsows. The sun hits that from morning to night. Everyday the shadow of the noose crawls from one end of the yard to the other. I'm careful not to let it touch me.

But that was just the morning.

It's the afternoon that was the real surprise.

I told about the gate in the far wall of the yard. The only thing they use it for is bringing in the loads of rock for breaking. Or piles of milpa vine for twining.

It's all solid, except for that barred window near the top. Above that, the wall goes on up for a long way. So it's nothing you can get through, or over.

One time they did an ugly thing at the gate.

A guard had gotten attacked by a birimba in the forest. His chest was all ripped open, and his face all twisted up as if he was still screaming. They tied his body to the gate to show us what would happen to us if we tried to escape into the woods.

And then, two days later, they shot the birimba who did it, though I don't know how they knew that, and they put the birimba's body there instead. It was bigger than anything you can imagine. They say it looks like something between a bear and an ape, whatever those are. Its teeth were bared, and it had tiny angry eyes, and its paw raised up stiff, like it was still about to attack. It had claws at the end of its fingers, but the fingers looked almost human. It gave you a funny feeling, those hand-paws.

Nobody was thinking of escaping anyway.

I shouldn't have told about that. It's too horrible. Maybe its because I don't talk, I have a whole basementful of words inside of me.

What I was going to say was about that little window. I like to look at it, because in all this stone Institute its the only place you can see trees. They change with the wind and the light and the snow and the rain. You get a different picture, depending on where you stand. You can look out there and you could be anywhere. I call it my dreamhole

At first, today, when I saw something there, I thought it *was* a dream. It was a little hand wrapped around one of the bars. Then another. And then a little girl, no bigger than a six-year-old, was perching on the edge of my dreamhole.

But the surprising thing, besides that she must have jumped that high all by herself, and besides that she came out of nowhere, was that she was naked. And bald.

So she sits there looking at me and Jem—Jem was staring at her by now—looking at us with the biggest eyes you ever saw. And she's muttering to herself, like telling herself what she's looking at. But not in words.

Then before you can count to ten, she squeezes between those bars, and drops to the ground light as a cat, like it was no further than jumping off a stool.

Then she stands there, naked, not exactly smiling, but looking kind of cheerful and pleased to see us.

"It's not human," Jem says.

And he's sort of right. She doesn't look quite human.

"Matron'll put that thing down before you can count to two," Jem says. "That's if Sister doesn't beat it to death first for being naked."

What I did next, if I'd thought about it, I might not have done it. I tore off my outer shirt quick as a whipstroke and dropped it over her head.

I noticed then that part of what made her look not human was that instead of ears she just had these little covered slits, like the gills of a fish.

Jem is staring at me, and I'm realizing that a creature as dumb as I pretend to be wouldn't have done that.

I was glad I did it, though, because my shirt was sort of like a dress on her, and right away she seemed more human. Meanwhile, she's looking down at my filthy smelly shirt, fingering it like it was a lady's gown. All the time chirping like a bird at daybreak.

"Crikes," Jem says, "You're a pair. That's all I need. One more speechless Ab."

Then he said, "That little beastly just made the biggest mistake in its little life, coming in. Matron'll send it out of here in a gunny sack before the day's over."

Well he was partly wrong. It's after dark, and she's still here. Sitting here on the mat beside me, looking at me with the openest eyes.

But of course Jem was partly right. Once Matron got over huffing and croaking at finding 'that thing' here, she said she'd have 'it' bagged up and out for the rubbish-and-dead collector tomorrow evening.

That gives me a day.

((or huffing and 'grocking'?)

YES AND NO

Morning

In the night I decided I would call her Roonya, since I don't know her real name. She slept most of the night curled up on the bottom of my mat, instead of on Tommy's old one. Jem slept in his usual place, in a room no bigger than a closet at the far end of the hall.

There's a little stream of sunlight coming in the window where Jem cleaned it. Roonya's dancing in the light, twirling around, and the blanket is spreading out around her. She looks like a bindweed flower, opening in the morning sun.

I was thinking all night about what to do so they won't kill her. Maybe I could get her to go away the way she came.

She's stopped dancing. She has her face right up to my notebook, trying to figure out what I'm doing. She's smelling the page.

I don't really want her to go away. And I have a feeling that I won't be able to make her. I'll have to think of some way to make them think she's useful. Maybe I can teach her to clean milpa vine.

She's staring up at the big hole in the plaster ceiling now. It's where it leaks when it rains. All you can see is the crossbeams above. And sometimes you can hear the bats at sundown, as they fly out through some hole up there in the attic. And again at dawn, when they come back in.

Once one flew in here, and then down into the main hall. We could hear Sister and Matron screaming all over the building. On and on and on. In the whole time I've been here, it's the only time I've heard the kids laugh.

Roonya's looking at that hole in the funniest way, almost like she's thinking of.....

Later

Well I can't make her come back down.

Who would think a human could jump like that. Once she got her hands around the crossbeam, she just swung herself up. There was this little face shining back down at me, and I'm begging her, "Roonya, please come down."

She mumbles back, meaning, "Come up here, come up here."

"Roonya, I can't. Hurry up. I have to teach you something today."

Mumble, chirp.

And finally she disappeared. I can hear her up there now, exploring. Maybe the bats will scare her back down. I can only wait.

It doesn't exactly surprise me that I can talk, or I should say whisper, without stuttering, to her. Like I said, I've always been able to talk to mice and birds without stuttering. And since she doesn't understand what I'm saying, it's sort of the same thing.

If I can just teach her to understand 'yes' and 'no', it will help. Maybe not the sound of the words, but nodding and shaking my head.

She's back at the hole.

Afterwards

So this is how the first word lesson went.

She was reaching down for me, like wanting me to come up. So I crumpled my eyebrows and mouth, and shook my head hard, slowly.

"No, Rooney, no, no, no."

That made her disappear again, leaving me standing there whispering at a hole. Luckily Jem didn't come in.

When she came back, she was even dirtier. And I scowled even harder.

"No, no, no, Rooney. Come down."

Finally, when she did come down, it was along with half the black dust from the attic.

So to finish the lesson, I tried to make my face look really happy, and hoped I didn't look as scary as Matron when she smiles, and I nodded, "Yes, yes, yes."

I don't think she was glad to be back down, but you could see she was glad I was glad. She put her arms around me and squeezed. So then I had to clean both of us up.

All the morning I've been jabbering away to her. I'm going to have to be careful Jern doesn't hear. I don't know where he is this morning. And Sister just rang the work bell.

So me and Rooney are off to the twining room.

TWINING

Jem wasn't in the twining room when we got there. With all the rest of them taken away, it was like a tomb. It's funny how even silence has an echo. We'd piled the new delivery of milpa vine onto the table yesterday, so there it was.

If you're an Ab, you know the jobs. First you get off the bark. Then you pound the vine till it's stringy. You separate it into threads, and spool it. Some of it will stay as string. Most of it we make into sacking cloth on one of the big looms. Not really 'we'. They figure I'm too dumb for the weaving part.

I was hoping Rooney and I would be alone in the room long enough for me to teach her how to peel bark. But Jem came rushing in, looking around to make sure Matron wasn't there yet. Guilty. Like he'd been doing something that was trouble.

Luckily for him, Matron was slow today. When she came in, her mouth and cheeks were shiny, and she smelled like sausage. The traders always bring special treats for her and Sister.

"So you'll be in charge here today," she says to Jem. "I can't be wastin' time here standing aroun' with the just the two of yer. The dummy'll be peelin' vine. And you'll be makin' me a piece of sackin'." She measured Rooney with her eyes. "'Bout so big." She held her greasy hands apart.

"You're in charge of the creature. No work, no food."

And out she goes.

I chose a seat for me and Rooney right behind Jem, where he wouldn't see me teaching her to strip bark.

It's funny how used to talking I'd gotten in such a short time. It was hard to keep my mouth shut while I showed her how you put your fingernails under a bit of the bark, then carefully work it up, till you can get enough of a fingerhold to peel a whole little strip of it.

I did that a few times, and she was watching carefully, which made me hopeful. But what does she do? She picks up the little peeled off strips of bark, and pops them into her mouth. Chews. Swallows.

I almost did talk then. But I caught myself in time, I shook my head, *No, no, no.*

She'd gotten used to me talking, too. She didn't like me shaking my head with no words coming out of my mouth. So she takes her fingers and puts them between my lips to open them. Then with the other hand she moves my jaw up and down, all the while opening and closing her own mouth, and nodding her head up and down, like to say, *Yes, yes, yes, Talk, talk, talk.*

That made a whole choke of laughter come out from me, I couldn't help it.

"What the...." Jem says, staring.

I turned the laugh into a cough, looked stupid, and went back to peeling. Jem went back to threading up the loom.

Now, as I peel, I'm stuffing the peels into my pocket as I go. So Rooney can't eat them. And wondering, how am I going to make her useful.

But she must have really loved those peels, and she must be hungry, because next I know, she's picked up her own vine, put it into one side of her mouth, moving her jaw fast as a chatter-squirrel, and pulled the vine out the other side, slick, peeled and clean as a whistle.

I just stared. In two minutes she's cleaned more vine than I could do in ten.

She nods once, *Yes?*

I nodded, *Yes!*

So I was letting myself get hopeful that Matron might not put Roonya down. We worked away, and by the time Matron comes in, the pile of peeled vine on the table is huge. Trouble is, as soon as Matron appeared, Roonya went still as a mouse.

"We'll., well, well," Matron says, "A good thing I kept the dummy on tradin' day. Look how much work he's done today."

I nudged Roonya, and pushed a piece of vine towards her, and nodded, meaning, '*Do it*'. But Roonyas was just kind of sniffing the air, like something smelled rotten.

"And how're we doing, handsome?" she says to Jem, checking the loom. Jem flinches like he's been hit. She's called him that a couple of times before, and you can see from his face, he'd rather be hit.

"Comin' along," she says. "I want that piece finished and cut and sewed by evenin'. In time for the collector. Sewed nice and strong, you hear?" She looked at Roonya, measuring her, then went on, "We got a new Knower, over the other side. A Plant Knower. Maybe he's got somethin' for puttin' that one down. Gives me the creeps the way it looks at me. Don't know if it's Ab or animal."

Matron clanked down some hard mealballs on the table before she left. I should have been glad. It was more than we usually get. But I'd lost my appetite. The picture of Roonya in a gunny sack was hanging there in my mind. I began to wish I hadn't gotten her down from the attic.

I guess she could tell that something was wrong. She put her nose up against my cheek, and rubbed it there, making little mumbles. It was meant to make me feel better, but my eyes filled up worse than yesterday when they took Tommy.

Clunk, clunk, clunk, Jem's loom was going.

Making Rooney's death bag.

If I didn't get back to peeling, Rooney wouldn't peel, and there'd really be no hope. So I blew my nose on my sleeve, peeled as fast as I could, and tried to come up with a plan.

That's when Jem starts chattering. After ten years of nothing but curses, and do-this, do-that, suddenly he has to really talk today. Not exactly talk *to* me. Anymore than when he talked yesterday. But he had to talk, and I was there.

For once I had something more important to think about. But I couldn't shut out his words.

"Something's going on," he says. "I know it. Something's going on."

Clunk. Clunk.

Right, I thought. They're going to kill Rooney, and you're making the bag to put her in. That's what's going on.

"Down in the smallbox, yesterday.....I heard something."

It was rats, I thought. You heard the cellar- rats. Now please shut up and let me think.

"At first I just heard voices, no words. But the words I did hear.....something about pigs....it sounded like *kinny pigs*...the voice was angry."

So it wasn't rats that he heard. But right then I knew what it was. It was one of the locals arguing with the traders about pork. Complaining that the pigs he was buying were too *skinny*. I wanted to tell Jem, I've heard a hundred arguments just like that with the traders. It's called bargaining.

"And then," Jem went on, "a different voice, threatening, said, '*We can force you,*' and the angry one said, '*You can hang me first*'."

"The last I heard, the threatening voice said something very quiet, and the other voice howled 'NOOO!' But by then the voice was less angry than.....like they'd threatened to take out his heart."

That told me something: it wasn't a *local* the trader was arguing business with, but a *guardsman*. Which meant the trader was a fool, because guardsmen would certainly take your heart out for less than a skinny pig.

But Jem keeps going, "So what I think is going on is...They've caught themselves a rebel down there. And they're going to try to get information out of him."

It was lucky Jem thought he was talking to the wall. And lucky I couldn't talk. Because if I'd said anything about his theory at all, it would be that he'd finally cracked up down there in the smallbox. And all the time he's talking, he's going back and forth with the shuttle. And for the first time in my life I can remember, I'm getting angry.

What I wanted to say was, *You're weaving Roonya's deathbag, you idiot*. Me of all people, wanting to call anyone an idiot. I'd moved on from peeling the milpa, to pounding it. You might say I was pounding it harder than necessary.

And Jem's still rattling on. "They want to get information like, 'Who are the rebels?' And 'Where are they hiding?' "

The first time I'd heard the word 'rebel' was yesterday from the trader, and suddenly Jem is acting like he owns the word. By now, I'm twining and winding the pounded vine onto a spool. I was winding it fast and tight enough to strangle an army.

Jem keeps on. "And they're going to make him tell what the rebels plans are."

His jabbering and the clank clunking of the loom made it impossible to think about how to save Rooney. Till now, in all the years, I can't remember ever trying to change anything that happened here. There's nothing you can do, so why try?

Jem goes on, clunking the loom, and talking. "So I went back down into the basement early this morning to listen, and check out that wall. It was quiet. I didn't dare tap or anything, because probably they've got him guarded."

Just shut up Jem. I've got to think. I'm winding faster and faster. There were pictures in my mind of all the Abs they'd hit, and put in the smallbox, or put down, or slaved out to die on the job. Like Tommy.

"If only there were someone, besides me," Jem said. "We could try working away at that wall together. One of us could keep guard, while the other one chipped at the mortar."

"Or....," and Jem got all excited like he'd just had this great idea, "one of us could get put in the smallbox, and the other could sneak down and let him out, so that he could really be working at the wall while they thought he was locked up."

Jem had stopped weaving because he had to reload his shuttle. He sighed, like coming back to the real world. Realizing there was *nobody* besides him.

He came over to get the spool I'd just finished.

I don't know why I didn't realize until that moment that the vine that Rooney and I made this morning would be used in her bag. I just saw red for a minute. I didn't plan anything. It just happened. I jumped up, snatched the shuttle stick from him, and broke it in two.

"You stupid dumb idiot!" he yells, and he starts to hit me with what's left of the shuttle.
"You're useless, useless, useless!"

Then a funny thing happened. Roonya jumps up on the table, reaches out, and strokes Jem's cheek. *Jem's* cheek. Like it was *him* that was hurt. It surprised him into stopping. He looked at the broken shuttle in his hand, and he looked at me. He closed his eyes and shook his head.

Then he went back to the loom.

It was quiet for a long time. Then he starts clanking, clonking, very slow, because of the shuttle being too short.

But I couldn't watch. And I couldn't work either. Roonya was still peeling away, so the pile in front of us kept getting bigger and bigger. I didn't have the heart to stop her.

Why had I thought I could save her? I couldn't even save myself. Idiot or not, I'd certainly be back in the old smallbox for breaking the shuttle. A lot of good I'd do her there.

The daylight was almost gone when we heard Matron's feet scuffling down the hall.

Like before, Roonya stopped everything, dropped everything.

Matron had a cup in her hand. Was she going to put Roonya to sleep first? Or poison her right in front of us?

"Lookee that," she said, seeing the pile. "The creature must be the devil himself to do so much work today."

I looked at Roonya. She was staring at me with her huge eyes, and wiggling her little nose like a rabbit. I couldn't stand it. I had to try. All I had to say was 'Roonya did it.'

"RRRRR.....RRHHRRR...." is how far I got. Louder and louder, "RRRRRRRRRRR"

I could feel my eyes bugging. I felt the hangman's breath on my neck, then the feel of the noose and the choking. I could see him with his black mask.

"RRRRRRR." I was still trying, frothy spit dribbling from my mouth. I couldn't breathe, and I knew that in a minute I'd pass out.

"Matter o' fact," I heard Jem's voice. "It wasn't the creature that did most of that pile. It was the little beasty. Fastest little Ab you ever saw."

I was seeing clear again. I could see in Matron's eyes that it was taking a while, but it was sinking in. She put the cup down, almost disappointed, and looked over at the loom.

"And the bag?"

Like her, I looked over at the loom. I don't know which of us was more surprised. Where the weaving had been longer than a man's arm at noon, it had shrunk down to the size of your thumb.

"Came undone," Jem said.

UNLATCHING

So its Jem in the smallbox, not me. He didn't tell that it was me that broke the shuttle. And he wouldn't say why he'd unwoven the gunny sack. Not that they needed it once they decided Rooney was useful.

She's sitting here beside me, wondering why I want to be making these useless marks on this page. She's touched them, and smelled them, she's put her earslit to the page to listen to them

She's kind of restless. Oops. There she goes again, up into the attic. No harm, except I'll have to clean her off again.

I'm kind of restless too. I'm not used to worrying about Jem. I usually figure he can take care of himself. But there's part of me that wants to sneak down and unlatch the box. So he can work on his wall. Even if he's kidding himself with that story.

I just saw something!

I told you I moved my writing spot so I wouldn't see the gallows through that cleaned spot in the window. So now, right through the clear part, I see one of those little high up Knowers' windows. And a dove just came out of it!

Has the window always been open? Have doves always been living in there?

I'm sure Matron doesn't know it. What a kettle-of-porridge it will be when she discovers a whole roomful of birds' nests. Imagine it, a room all white with bird droppings. Won't she be howling.

I wish I could tell Jem about it.

For me, it's not so much that I don't want anyone to know that I can talk. It's that I don't want anyone to know that I stutter. You probably think that's strange that anyone would rather be called an idiot than a stutterer.

Last night, after I tried to talk, for a few minutes I thought that Jem and Matron KNEW. I felt like I'd turned into something slimy and low, something you wouldn't want to touch, something that should live under a rock.

I could hear the voice of that earliest Matron, saying SHAME, with each whish of the caning stick.

Luckily for me, Matron and Jem both thought I was having a 'fit'.

And it was Jem that saved Rooney, saying it was her that cleaned the vine.

I can't stop thinking about him down there.

What could it hurt to sneak down there and just lift open the smallbox latch? Rooney's busy in the attic.

I'm back. I did it.

Jem must have been practicing patience in there, or sleeping. I lifted the latch so quietly, he couldn't have heard it. Now all he has to do is move, and the door will bump open. When he hears Matron coming down to let him out, he can get back in and slam the door shut. The latch falls back into place with the slightest bump.

What will he think?

I hope he gets a chance to dig away at the wall. Though I know the story he was spinning about those voices was craziness. The smallbox can do that to you.

It's funny. I don't even know who you are, reading this. But I couldn't wait to tell you that I'd opened that bolt.

I'm thinking about that song that the trader was humming (singing) (is going through my mind (words, etc.) I wonder if I could sing it.

Cut: I wonder if it could be part of the 'something' that Jem thinks is 'going on'.

NEXT

I wiped another place clean on the glass, and I sit so I can see the dove window. It's still open, or open again, even though this is a freezebiting day you wouldn't want blowing into your room.

I'm keeping my eye on it while I write.

After Matron let Jem out of the smallbox, he was weird-eyed. Sister set us to scrubbing and mopping the whole of the Institute—I mean our side of it. She gets like that every time—after the traders take away a bunch of abs—like she wants to wash all the scruddley bits of the old abs out of her life. But she needs a couple of us to do it for her. Then we'll be the only dirty things left. So she'll call in the butcher—the same one who cuts off infected hands and things—and he'll take us naked out into the yard and bucket us down with laundry water, and shave our heads down to the skin with his meatcutting knife, while Matron boils our clothes. Sister doesn't like naked things, so either Matron gives us the wet clothes to put right back on, or they give us some rubbish-rag clothes from the village.

I don't look forward to it, the haircutting. I need the hair. It takes more work to look like an idiot if they can see your eyes.

So anyway, we were at the end of the upstairs hall on our hands and knees with the big scrub brushes and a bucket of something that burns our noses.

I tried to get Rooney to do something that would look useful, but she was going through the pile of floor-scrubbing rags, and draping them around herself, and petting them, and cooing like a mourning dove.

Jem kept stopping, looking around confused, and shaking his head. And then, like yesterday and the day before, he started talking. Not really talking to me of course. Just talking.

“So I made a little hole through to the Knowers’ basement. The room was empty.”

Which didn’t surprise me.

“I was sure they had a rebel,” he said.

Well that should have been the end of it, but I could tell from his voice that it wasn’t.

“At least the rebel wasn’t in that room anymore.”

Oh no, now what, I was thinking.

“But here’s the strange thing,” he goes on. “The reason I could make a hole into the other room is that someone unlatched the small box. It must have happened awhile after Matron locked me in. I didn’t hear anything, but suddenly I could open the door!”

“So...,” says Jem, “It wasn’t Matron.”

I scrubbed.

“And it wouldn’t be Sister.”

I scrubbed.

“It couldn’t be you.”

You’ll be surprised, but I took it like a spit-in-the-eye the way he was so sure about that. Which should make you laugh. I already said I try so hard to make everyone think I’m a porridge-head. And suddenly I’m getting hoity, like he should think I’m someone.

“So,” says Jem, “it’s got to be that there’s somebody in the building we don’t know about.”

I soaked up the dirty water with a rag and squeeze it into the bucket.

“Like a rebel,” he said. “Hiding out.”

The dove is back! Sitting there on the sill of the open window. There's something wrong with its leg, like a lump on it.

It's gone now, hopped inside.

You won't believe this!

Someone just closed the window!

Reaching up from below like to a high wall window! They looked like a man's hands! So it wouldn't be Matron or Sister. Not that they would have a pet pigeon. Except to eat.

It would be strange if it was a Knower. I've seen some Knowers. Stony-face men. Not men to fix a pigeon's hurt leg. I'm saying that because I'm thinking that was what was on the bird's leg— a little bandage. (Or save bandage for later. Just, Not pigeon-friend kind of people.)

Who could it be?

You'll think I'm the crazy one now. Because I'm beginning to wonder what that word *rebel* means.

JEM'S STORY

“So I’ve looked everywhere,” Jem said.

We were out hack-hacking at the rocks in the dust of the yard. Matron’s got the idea that if we make a big pit, they can bring in rich earth from outside to put into it. ‘Rich earth’ is just what she called it, so I know it wasn’t her idea. I’m guessing it was that (new) Plant Knower—the one that mixed up the death-drink for Rooney. Probably that’s what they really want to grow in this pit—poison-plants. Maybe he’s really a Death Knower. (Later? It wouldn’t surprise me. I can make a good guess who he’ll try out his potions on)

“So,” Jem started up. “I’ve checked every corner of the basement, and every cupboard in the kitchen. I’ve even looked under the beds in Matron and Sister’s rooms.”

That explained Jem’s disappearing so often last week. He’d have spent a week in the smallbox if they’d caught him skooking around.

“There’s no way there’s anyone hiding here. Matron must’ve just accidentally not latched the box, and for once I didn’t notice because I was so busy thinking about rebels.”

I could hear from his voice he was just finally letting himself lose hope. The funny thing is, I always thought that Jem needed to stop hoping. It’s like wishing for a warm day in winter. First wishing something, then angry that it isn’t so. Wishing, then angry, wishing, then angry. You might as well beat your face against the stone walls.

The way I keep going is to BE the stone walls. I call it corpsing. I think I got the idea of going dead from the smallbox, which is really a child’s coffin. When things are really bad, I corpse for days at a time.

But the funny part about it is that it's Jem that's finally losing hope, and it's ME that wants to tell him about the pigeon-window and the man's hands.

I don't know what a rebel is, but I know that it would not be a mean man that would put a bandage on a pigeon's leg. And I think Jem would like to know about it.

While we were shoveling, I kept looking up at the window. But it was closed.

Roonya, the whole time, was perched up on the rim of my dreamhole, just inside those bars she came in through—how many days ago—looking out at the forest, twitching her nose, and cocking her head like a little bird.

Suddenly she turns her head, and makes a little twittering sound. She's looking up toward the window, with her whole body, the way animals do.

. The pigeon window was open, and the pigeon was standing on the ledge.

It still had that lump on its leg. But here's the strangest thing. It was on *the other leg!* Why would anyone put a bandage first on one bird-leg, then the other?

The bird took up into the air with a squeaky shooshy sound, over the yard, and gone, and me and Roonya staring after it. For a minute I felt like it was me flying out into the forest.

I looked back at the window. It was closed.

Jem hadn't seen a thing. He looked so sad. I wanted to tell him, *Something IS going on. There IS a rebel in the other side.*

Not knowing what 'rebel' means, I'm starting to feel like it means pigeon-friend, but I know that's not true.

We can find a way to meet him, I wanted to say. *A way to get a message to him.*

Jem was looking really bad, sweaty and ashy, and when I thought about it, he hadn't been looking so good all morning. He sat down inside his end of the pit we were digging. It was deep

enough that I could only see his head, and one hand that he had out on the dirt. His sleeve had pulled back, so I got a look at his wrist for the first time in a while. It was rotten and oozy, a bad looking thing.

“You’re lucky to be an idiot,” Jem said.

And then after a while, “Maybe I’m the idiot. Hoping again. That she’d come.”

His eyes were closed. Like it was just dreamtalk.

“None of it would have ever happened if that girl hadn’t walked out of the woods and up to our door.”

The sweat was dropping onto his eyelids.

“The girl’s name...,” he looked like he was back there then, “well, we called her Nell, and dyed her hair. To keep it a secret who she was. Cause she’d seen the guards shoot her father, for no reason. She’d come all the way through the woods from a different village by herself. They’d of killed her if they knew she saw them do it.”

Jem was sort of smiling, like he must have liked her.

“I got along with Nell. Better than with my sister Cassie. Cassie and me were always spating. Though she could be the best, when you really needed her.”

He shook his head.

“That’s why I thought she’d come. I thought both of them would come.”

He was quiet for a long time. If I’d been able to talk, I’d have asked him what had happened. Luckily he started talking again.

“It was *my* idea. Me, and Cassie and Nell, and my best friend Dolan, we were sitting around. And I said we should start a secret group against the rulers and guards. It was a boring day, and I just said it for something to talk about. But Cassie and Nell, pretty soon they were

making a plan, a *real* plan. To go away from the village to a secret place, and start a real group: of rebels.”

I acted busy, scriggling stones out of the edges of the hole with my fingers, getting close enough to be listening but not looking like it.

“I thought I was going with them,” he said.

Then he was quiet for the longest time.

“They said I was too young, and that since I was already doing farming work under the guards, I’d be missed, and the guards would start snooping, and figure it all out.

“One morning they were just gone.

(Cassie leaves him her favorite sling shot—or he remembers that later)

“They didn’t even tell me where.”

Now all that sweat from his forehead was mixing with tears, and before you know it, there was Jem, who’s never dripped a tear, sitting in that hole in the ground bawling so hard I thought he would puke.

Finally he wiped his snot on his sleeve, and spat.

“If Dolan hadn’t blabbed about the plan, and me getting put here, I’d have found them sooner or later. I’m as good a fighter as Cassie any day.”

I felt better, him sounding like himself again. But I don’t like the look of his wrists.

BOOK

I'm, sorry I stopped writing so suddenly. The most exciting thing just happened.

When Rooney jumped down from the attic, she had something with her. You will never guess it. All covered with scruddle and bat droppings.

A book. A book as fat as a hundred county reports. Rooney thrunked it down on top of my notebook (does he have a diff word for his notebook?) She put her slit-ear down onto the opened page and she smelled it and she looked at me. Like to say, Is this the same kind of thing as your book?

"It's better. Much better, Rooney. It's a book"

And I said B-O-O-K slowly, with my lips big, over and over, as if she could learn to talk, and Book was the only important word, even more important than YES.

She opened her mouth, and moved her lips all around. Like doing a funny-mouth means Book.

The cover is hard and red. It's so fat that there's room on the back edge for the name. It's called...

Roonya knows I like it, because I hugged it. I wanted to read it all at once and at the same time I wanted reading it to last forever. (The book begins,or put that later?)

What else is in the attic?

I have to get up there.

Now I know what Jem means that it would be good to have two people. Not just so one could be the watcher-out. But...well I can't explain why.

APPENDIX B

PAGES FROM A PROCESS-JOURNAL

To the reader: Finding myself frustrated by looking back at the path I took in writing the first book, and seeing only a jumbled crisscrossing of tracks like those left by a flock of birds, I began dating and transcribing all the bits and pieces of ideas as they came to me.

Not only did I put them methodically into Microsoft Word, I sorted them for relevance into one category and another. So each of the fleeting ideas is arranged not only chronologically, but also into category, or categories.

There is a separate section for each character; for the socio-political background of the imaginary state; for minor elements of plot; for broader developing themes; for ideas on point of view; and for thoughts on the creative process itself.

This process journal is just under 150 pages. Included here are some excerpts from that material which dealt specifically with the creative process, followed by some of the earliest pages of the process journal, un-excerpted, in chronological order.

Some excerpts on creative process

I want this all to fit together as beautifully as a chinese puzzle ball. And here it sits as lifeless as the dirt road I walk.

The outer have-to's, shoulds, goals, at expense of or to exclusion of being.

I was thinking I would trade ten years of my life for the ability to write well. Which includes, in my mind: the clarity of intelligence' and (the opposite?) permeability of mind which leads to metaphor. Am I forgetting passion?

Should I be putting more energy into 'honing the tool'?

Funny that I should want to acquire a capacity for openness *so that* I can write. One 'should' have an openness which gives birth to poetry.

My characters in this book at this stage desire nothing. They are resigned. How depressing. How familiar. They have no energy to imagine or do the unthinkable. How depressing. How familiar.

Looking out upstairs window at Roque Bluffs. The fog, breathing gently through the vivid green of the spruce, blue-green fir, pea-colored ash. Beyond it softens a towering wind-ravaged spruce to a mute darkness, and still further, softens a long-dead lacy fir to gray. After that, all but erased, just a hint of the continuous pointed profile of the forest at sea's edge. A distant ravine appears as from a magician's handkerchief, and in a wink, gone again.

I have tried mapping the overall book, in terms of chapters. But do I map each chapter? The difference between mapping a chapter, and just beginning, and watching what characters do.

September has many more days like this up her sleeve. A cookie jar of beautiful days.

Metaphors sprouting like toadstools after a rain.
The difficulty of finding pegs for my thought

It is impossible, when depressed, to have the range of emotion with which to imbue characters. It is impossible, without hope, to give them anything to look forward to, aspire to, achieve.

It is difficult, as a fearful person, to have anything happen which I myself would fear. Or, as a guarded person, to have them connect at a deep level. This is where the inarticulate Wiggala, the half-animal Rooney, come in.

The trick is to develop an awareness, consciousness, of when a passing thought has kidnapped us, dragging us blindfolded to a destination out of our path, where we plunge eagerly, obsessively, down a dead-end. Some detours are useful. But even those I would rather take with my eyes open.

As I walk on the road this sweet morning, the road damp and the leaves beaded with dew, I am not called to write about a miserable mute boy in a cruel and oppressive institution.

Limit, form, definition, shape vs. floating, wide sweep of intuition, grace. But of course it's the alternation.

I'm so confused about how to grapple with this, I feel as incapable as a stone in the road of proceeding.

Writing: a process of contraction and expansion. Footwork and dreaming. Like a hawk, I am floating over the territory, circling, circling, waiting. Still in the stage of casting a wide net.

Is my reluctance to type out my notes, even, the result of an inner understanding that it is too soon to 'contract'?

Is all I have to do sit here, open my mind, easy as turning on the tap?

I am the story beast, sometimes creeping through the silt of the marsh, sometimes on powerful wings over the grand spread below. My arms are the tree limbs, the river branches, the mountain ranges

As with music, it needs the rumbling undertone of the larger picture.

All those 'holistic' explorations are part and parcel of my creative path. I already knew that meditation when practiced for even a tiny time, opened up a crack through which a wealth of material could flow.

But how can I evolve the discipline to 'practice' with my rebelliousness against form. Yesterday I was struck by how everything is a balance of discipline and freedom, the manifest and unmanifest, inspiration and perspiration, a bowl and the emptiness within it.

A continual expansion and contraction. The visible and invisible, waking and sleeping, deciding and drifting.

Story as a 'dish' combining soft, crunchy, sweet, bitter, acid. etc. Or as a well-designed fish, -- it's face to it tail, its spine and fins, and the sheen of its skin.

I have trouble with this because I cannot stand to read, or write, about cruelty. Wilfert was rarely on the scene. And much of it was only hinted at.

A leaf floating on a pond.

The non-interaction, and interaction, between what is hidden below, underwater, and what is visible, in the light, above.

How much harder it is to write a book which is a 'duet' rather than a solo.

As Creatch and Rooney wind twine, I try to find the string that pulls through the story.

After just that many ideas, I want to stop. Look away. Step back. It's as if my mind is in the process of seizing up, over-thinking, and I need to get away from these ideas and allow them to remain fluid and flexible for longer----a woven bag which must still have lots of space between the twine.

I need, within me, the energy with which to inform my characters and story.

For me, part of the experience of writing, as well as living, is that of hanging over a precipice, with my fingers just curled over its edge. Wishing I could pull myself up onto it, but with luck, just holding on.

A day to stay in the void, allowing for clearing and healing, taking in, not producing, input, not output.

The part of me that is resisting writing, : A big long-armed oaf--innocent, dumb, inactive--

The part that wants me to get things done: a female bespectacled, angry strict, shrill.

Maybe best to write story first, and think more about layer of 'voice' on second time through. Was if the author of Holes, or Lowry or Bond who hardly referred to first version in doing the second.

Is the layer of 'language' , 'voice', which I'm so concerned about, interesting to kids? Am I mentally writing for the adult critic?

As soon as I figure out What is going to happen, I have little incentive to fill it in.

Roonya is like a shaft of sunlight into their lives. But I don't have to say that.

I have become an inhibiting force in the writing of this story. Will I? Won't I? Can I? Can't I?
JUST GET OUT OF THE WAY.

The pictures in my head happen in dreamtime. Why am I so reluctant to write them down? Partly it's as if I'm afraid to let go of the whole fragile fabric of the story to concentrate on a piece of it, as if in turning my attention from its entirety, it will evaporate, disintegrate, disappear.

At one extreme, I want all details in suspended flux until the whole is clear. And yet, many little details don't 'appear' to me until I put myself into the character in the moment.

Why do I hold back from doing that? My preference for the infinity of possibility over the limitations of the specific, among other things?

I ask myself where I should begin today. Although each time I ask, a picture enters my of C and the hole in the ceiling; pretend ignorance, as if unanswered. Helloo-o-o.

The book is too dark. It must be lit. By what?.

Given energy, my inclination is to get busy and Do. Which is I suppose the body wanting to discharge it. Gut couldn't it just as well turn inwards and create? Will the body settle for this? How about creating on a walk, etc.

Again the question: Write it up (1st 5 chaps) or keep sketching. Looking back at 1B, I have found some 'straighter' paths and more economical form. But what am I missing in terms of little twists which might emerge?

No mercy today. Today it seems to me that the reason I can't write is because I'm too busy asking myself why I can't write.

I am trying to meditate, while in mind and body, I am stalking the challenges in my life with a bayonet. I take my daily dose of positive thoughts quickly, like a vitamin pill.

Can I write about a boy having a love affair with language when I have not had the same?

In meditation, a fragile construct, a mobile suspended mid-air, of how, God willing, things might be. Barely seen, its parts held together with shafts of light, glimpses of love, half-formed hopes, suggestions of a self which flickers in the corner of the eye.

Imaging writing a book as short (and perfect) as Sarah Plain and Tall. Maybe a story about (and for) Becca.

I just had the funniest thought about this book. It was, "Gosh, I wonder how it's going to turn out." (Not how good. But, what's going to happen?. As if it were as mysterious and 'out of my hands' as any reader's.

The importance of specific Surprising detail, or vivid metaphor in making this story 'walk'. The story becomes a beast in its own right. Walking, slouching, snarling, resting (?) It has a look in its eye, a sound to its breath.

The job of breathing life into the story. Though usually I imagine it is something (I picture the northwind, its cloud lips to the back of my neck) breathing life into Me.

To claim as discussible territory all those 'waiting rooms' to thought, those fringes of the final weaving. These are place which I, as an artist, claim for my own. Allowing my attention to creep ever so gradually further into the territory of the pre-conscious, to surprise the creatures of my imagination in their fetal stages. To learn not to dust off all the telling debris of their beginnings.

Why do I see Leora with a golden scepter. And me, with This story, a broken stick. Beneath my story questions, there is a question of attitude. I keep telling people about the book's problems, making them inevitable.

My initial question about whether to write this book at all. And now, as if to punish myself for disobeying the inclination not to do it, I cannot succeed. A little girl in me wants to kick those little boys to death.

POV question.

And beneath that, is there a Concept problem to the book?

The plot would move along nicely enough, but is the flower it would bear related to the root?

What does Leora, and her reunion with her father, have to do with Creature? (PS. Wd it not be just like Creature to find Someone Else's father for them?)

Is this story a necessary evil? The price I pay for writing a sequel to a book which is already finished (PS. I just remembered that the original impetus for a sequel to this book was So That Leora could find her father, the father Melanie 'wouldn't let' me find for her in HT.)

Shall this story be a shining ball, (rather than a broken stick)?

After a series of freezing, windy gray days, the morning sun breaks through beneath the clouds, a piercing shaft of sunlight glorifies the room.

I now hold a scepter for this story, and the words come to me: "Creature speaks."

I am having trouble finding C's voice because I am not so much a word person as a visual person. (though I should be careful not to pronounce self-fulfilling prophecies, not to turn an oft repeated comment into an epitaph; a rut into a grave.)

Why is it a surprise to realize that my pleasures, tendencies, gifts, are on the side of imagination, intuition, free-floating, and my weakness on the side of will, discipline, concerted effort. Manifestation. I want it all to drop into my lap from a clearly imagined cloud.

Going into 1st person is one way women have placed themselves in the minds of boys/men. (Crystal Cave, MacAvoy's Lens trilogy)

Maybe the purpose of this activity is not so much to produce a book, as to learn to write. Or should I say wrestle with the issues of writing. And whatever that entails of the issues of being.

As I contemplate moving to 1st person, all I have written so far is like the weightiest of burdens. An anchor. A manacle. A roughly built abode. A half-built house of sticks, which does not even have the best floor plan for a house to be built of stone?)

I remind myself, as I envision my entire identity as a writer as a bubble which might or pop, that I am just the midwife to this story.

Shaping the story is a little like doing Tai Chi. Every move intuited, just enough, but not too much. Spare in being precisely true to the given moment.

'Jem is gagged. Like me'

I have been feeling so---so what? since I stopped writing and started teaching. Like a helpless murky puddle instead of a river, or even a piddly stream. Shall I this? Shall I that? Whatever I do, I better not do it for long, or with commitment, because time will cut it short. I better not give much of myself to this or to that, because there won't be any of that small commodity of 'self' left to give to all those other faint-hearted directives. Guilty no matter What I do, of not doing something Else (at the same time?)

If I ask what it is that I would give myself to these days, what calls me with a subterranean roar, (or an aeolic vibration) , is to heed the call of 'otherworld', in two ways:

*to experiment with altered 'states of consciousness' (which I envision as a fertile fantasy land, a frontier for exploration, an invitation to the unexpected, a somewhere Else.)

and

*Secondly, to write a book (this phrase crossed out) tell a story (note the correction) which flowers out of the same territory. A story which hinges on varying perspectives of diff. mind states, where real-life physics provides no deterrent to the interactions between, among, the manifestations of psychic energies. Like Sheri Tepper, to envision a world/society which is both the logical manifestation of particular polarities, and the matrix within which (or in opposition to which) forces (inter)act.

My Book II has become a lode stone, weighing me down, not only with the darkness of the Institute, but with its earthbound obedience to the realistically possible.

(As I write this I find that I'm able to go inwards, a little like Gendlin's 'focusing', and in a way which I usually am only able to do while meditating--and retrieve that word/image from that amorphous soup within.

Is it partly that I set my mind to 'seeing' what web is defining my reality these days? By definition a search for the invisible.

Re-reading this, it suddenly occurs to me to punctuate Creature's diary with Leora's point of view, bringing, literally, Sunlight to the book. As each morning at home I roam restlessly for a place in the light (which is also Warm and Silent)

I had been thinking that Creature should early on begin addressing his book to a 'you', which evolves, and finally manifests when real people (Leora and maybe Jem) actually read the book. This Meta-plot might hold, contain, the book in a larger pair of hands.

I stand up, and find myself in 'reality' the other world closing to me.

If I'm to be writing children's books, let them be flowing with/from me, rooted within me, May my characters be involved with navigating my own terrain. May their adventure be my adventure.

sound studies
kundalini
nootropics
heartmath
Anna Wise
automatic writing
Monroe
higher self
spirit guides
chakra animals
psycho synthesis selves
past-life selves

interior adventure
accessing my own capacities
aiding creative process
exploratory tools to affect body, providing windows to the inner infinite
guides to provide guidance
openness to a energy broader, brighter, than my own consciousness

I want to discover, explore, enjoy, the embodiments, symbols, the dance among things. Point, counterpoint. The mud on the rootlets, the winding of the trail. I want to sing the song and tell the tale.

Wrapped in a quilt, watching the wind in the naked cherry tree. The rain in the puddles between melting snow. A cherry tree would never try to be an oak. Complain about the winter. Wonder what fruit to bear.

The issue of rushing around trying to find external solutions. One more vitamin, book, property. A new place to work. Even the search for new approaches to internal solutions can steal time and energy.

I would like to incorporate the realization that the real tyranny is of my innate Resistance to structure. That practice--whether meditation, exercise, writing--is an opening of choice. It is a door to freedom. Provides for a broadening of the universe. A structure within which complexity can play My escape hatch to the infinite.

I wish I could dissolve this view of writing. That it is my yoke. And Anything else is freedom.

Levels of story:

- Creature Speaks. (comes into his own).
- Knowledge, integration of knowledge, knowledge as freedom (Library. Freeing of Moran).
- Connection.(North and South Families from diff. towns. Bridge. Family Trees)
- Redefinition of abnormal. What would the beginning of this look like at a societal level? Maybe C decides to Teach. Turn the Institute into a school.

No sooner did I get a bunch of great new ideas for a book other than the sequel to Hermit Thrush, than I get a bunch of ideas for the sequel itself.

For one thing, There needs to be a bio-ecological problem in this post-holocaust world, which Leora feels some urgency to solve--and which only her father, with his interest/knowledge of the natural world can figure a solution to. This finally would tie Leora into the plot in a way which is related to her father (as opposed to a gratuitous, sentimental reunion).

(God it feels good to be doing this again. I feel like the whole world fits again, At this moment it feels like if there was any question about whether to do photography or a/the book, it was just answered.)

The ecology idea ties a lot together. Does it tell me anything about point of view? I'm afraid to read notes from before, for fear that the old wagon tracks will trap my wheels. And horrified at the thought of reading actual text. I will try to stay open to new stuff. Especially since I'm too busy to do much in a concerted way.

I am so happy!!!!!!!!!!!!

A tektonic shift, or ongoing shifts, as I allow myself to re-vision this story.

The need for the story to be driven by hope.

(on reading the 1st page of I Capture the Castle): The need for the protagonist to see the world with love-for-something.) The reader's emotinal drive to CONNECT these characters (and their information, vital to each other.)

The impetus to hurl myself into mindless busy-work—tidying, shopping, etc. when a). I have reports to write, and b) I have a book/thesis to write.

And even earlier, my resistance to even 3 minutes of stretching to set my body up for the day. And then the resistance to 10-20 mins of yoga or meditation, or even smelling the sweet Maine air outside the window. Am I just passive-aggrssive? And afraid I'll be possessed by these things?

I imagine them tugging me into a river. Of being?

As if I treasure, above all, my ability to say NO.

Unless the world says to me, 'you can't.' Then I say, 'I will if I want to, goddamn you.

So I spend my whole life fighting at the gate. About which side of it to be on. Losing all pleasure of the territory beyond.

Like all semester I can't wait to write. But once I can, I feel like 'I have to', and resist.

But this is all a little different than the other issue. The resistance to the wholesness of being, the willed deafness to the call from the core.

It just occured to me that that's what all fiction is really about: a person allowing themselves to become who they REALLY are.

—
Now: a stirring of all the creatures of the swamp, tightly packed as eels in a bucket.
Story as swamp.

Thesis—all metaphor process?

Or; Personal practices (inc. metaphor, talking to characters, walking, piracetam, left-right, breathing)

If now the story feels at the stage of eels awakening, shifiting, in the primordial ooze, what do I want it to be finally?

+A chase on horseback through the woods?

+Hide and seek in the woods?

+Watching the growth of an unknown tree, where each sprouting branch brings a surprise.

—
I am waiting for the magical sliding into place of this all. Does working at it help? Undoubtedly, but only at that point when I've 'turned away'.
—

Amazing that I'm still puzzling over story at this point. Should I assume it will become obvious as I write?. Or would that be like digging holes with nothing in them?

But it's all from Creatch's pov that rings like a bell._

It seems I have a predilection for the Dickension complexity of plot. Which equals long book. Which equals long time.

Maybe I should alternate this (or side by side) work on short books of metaphoric simplicity for younger readers. Like Sarah Plain and Tall.

I imagine a conference of my readers, editors, characters, and muse, sorting it all out.

--

A multiflayered plot with snaking connections. A dense mat of rootlets, lichen, and miniplants.

Going to the core of this, a look at my negative thoughts on it:

+Not autobiographical, like Hermit Thrush.

+Flawed by the demands of a sequel.

+I'm not a good enough writer to meet the demands of writing this in 1st person.

+and all in all, it won't be good.

Is there a deeper voice, saying that I wasn't meant to succeed with this?

Should I speak to each complaint, one at a time—agreeing, reflecting, considering?

Or just step out of the box?

Also, I have a number of assumptions about me and writing.:

+I'm a good story-inventor, but not much of a writer.

+I can only write when I have long periods of free time, and the less company the better.

+That walking is good for my writing.

+First thing in the morning is good for my writing, and if I miss it, forget it.

+My mind is clearer and more productive if I only have one kind of food, pref. no more than fruit.

Meditating. Clearing the airwaves. Like an instrument that needs to rest before being played.

What more is the driving core of a story than the drive to be whole. That's what a story is about.)

How separable is the creative work of writing from the creative work of becoming? Not at all. No wonder they share the same bag of tricks. (How separable is being a rose bush, and flowering?)

I might have gotten up too early, in an effort to build in writing time before breakfast. On the one hand, it is this time that counts, works. But I'm sleepy enough to have trouble bringing focus, energy, enthusiasm to the story, the characters. Do I need coffee? Exercise? To rev up? Or surrender, daze/doze out, and hope that story-related ideas will come to me.

In my invisible network of can'ts and have-to's. How appealing the 'adventure', where none of it seems to apply.

The have-to's of surviving TODAY don't bother me.

The bog at the end of Peninsula Road. A symphony of birdsong, punctuated by bull-frog. When I stop to listen to what the swamp is saying, I can feel the other story, the one not being written.

Imagining the actual rhythms, highs and lows, of this story as a symphony. Noticing that these little pieces are not building. They are like beads on a string with no widening of the sound.

Rational verbal approach:

*What is happening here at the emotional level?

+C and J are needing each other more, more drawn to each other, but not connecting.

Spurts of closening.

+Jem is confiding things he will regret when he hears C talking.

At the Maynor or Institute or town level, what is new? Birmbas? Knower? Rooney? Does she disappear for a hile?

+Could they all be put to cleaning? Why would Matron want that? Or is it Sister?

+How do we get news in from the outside?

What I need here is a breakthrough from the underground or the beyond. Turn away. And listen to some music. Maybe Beethoven symphonies, with some drama and a story line. (Later: I did listen to Beethoven 1st and 2nd in the car. Unfortunately the car-hum drowns out the lower tones, so I have to turn it up higher than works with the loud notes. But in general, Beethoven is too orgasmic, climactic, for all but a revolution).

I had been curious about the effect on the brain, for purposes of writing, of using one eye versus the other. Yesterday I got bit on my eyelid by a black fly, and if I relax my face, my right eye is almost closed.

Why am I not starting at writing the next chapter?

There has been no aha! For the next scene in terms of location. Though I know much of the general onward motion. There's some connection unmade. Maybe I'll go for a walk.

Capacities of mind:

Clarity
Audio-senso-‘verbisual’
Heart/soul spirit
Holistic view of place/world/system
Story
Resonance/light
Beauty/awe/spirit
Humor.

(Love, truth, beauty, laughter)

If I started Hermit Thrush with Leora looking out the gate, shouldn't I start Abs with Creatch listening to WORDS, or eyeing a book?

Maybe writing in his book is sort of it. But I could crank up his love of the trader's song.

Sorting through story possibilities like though a deck of cards—considering, moving on. Not so much gets written down as earlier.

Should knowers even exist?

Yes. They represent the repression of knowledge.

Should Ferrel be Leora's father?

I don't know.

With all that under my belt this morning, I have a can-do attitude and energy. For days I have barely able to lift myself out of the muck of inaction.

Reading Voight's "Vandermark Mummy" yesterday—not one of her best—I thought, I can do as well (or better) than this.

It was very tidy, but superficial. A mystery, so what would one expect.

After warming up with some general thoughts, I said Just Do It. And began the next section, not knowing what person it would be in.

I have a feeling about this story right now that it is constricted. I imagine it funneling through a too-narrow channel. Or that the tones are too similar, or the issues not grand enough.

It makes me want to include a chapter of Leora etc at sea, the hugeness of the world.

Do they experience the same storm at the Institute?

And also the breadth of the issue of repression—of persecution for difference.

—
I need the nourishment from the ROOTS of this project. Though it is me that must nourish the roots. What it feels like, though, is that I need to open my consciousness to the existence of the roots. As if they are already there, and I need only go deep enough in myself to see/feel/hear them.

‘Roots’ gives the impression of the origin of the process, which is not what I mean here. I’m thinking more of the supporting foundation of the story-world, but foundation sounds too man-made, controlled.

Roots have power. What’s in the roots will ‘out’. In the Plutonian (planetary) sense.

If troops come in, we need noise, violence, splitting families, man-handling, persecution, false charges, enforced informing (book hoarding). And stong-arming the knowers? Maybe killing one? Or memory of that.

What is this inclination to stop writing?

I’m about to write something which isn’t ture. Something boring. Not essential. Not forward-moving. Maybe the right hing happening, but not embodied by ythe most metaphoric event.

(thoughts on digging in a rose this morning.)

Creature and Jem do get conscripted for digging (at once? Evenutally?)

I should just put what I need into the story—& figure out the supporting ‘fiction’ later.

A taste of the guards’ brutality.

Hard hard labor. At one point Leora looks into the face beside her. It’s Yano!

Howie has been importing rebels, infiltrating the village, house by house.

Only the hard labor of digging would have brought that bit of plot to mind. And only being so pissed as I was feeling this morning would have made me do it in my creative-edge morning-time.

(I’m starting to talk like Creatch, combining words—like an actor practicing The Method.

Do the rebels make another bridge? And ferry people over and infiltrate? Ferry people over and they wait elsewhere? And/or take advantage of the Guards’ bridge?

Was the biridge-working idea, for better or worse, born of hard-work endorphin? Anger? Synchronicity?

One advantage of solitude is that EVERYTHING can be fodder for the story. Is that a fully human way to live? No doubt, visual artists can stay more connected with the real outer world.

Writers have incestuous relationships with a full cast of their own inner personalities. What an anti-social indulgence (I wanted to say a 'wonderfully anti-social' indulgence. The real me will out.

All this time it's been my editor 'Melanie' in my mind telling me Ferrel shouldn't be Leora's father. I just had a fantasy admitting to her that I'd originally intended that. And her saying it sounded like a good idea. And me saying, I don't think so.

Theresa S-S. in "Sonic Alchemy", in her interview with Josh Leeds, talks about the music which best allows for the letting go of life by those clinging to the threshold at death's doorway.

She speaks of 'unbinding'—how even the rhythms and melodies of Mozart are too,,,

Her (their) discussion of 'letting go', dying IN life.

In what way is the creative process about letting go, opening up (only possible with letting go);

RE-becoming (or is it embracing); articulating (or manifesting); and letting go again.

Should whole thesis be about the alternation between 2 stages, or sequence of x stages (and should they be thought of as so discreet as that, as opposed to flow)

The other thing about letting go is that it includes letting go WHO ONE IS, a necessary process in becoming someone(s) else, as one must in fiction.

It occurs to me that for me, that is much of the allure of fiction: to cease to be me.

Oh my God, at 7:00 am the sky is getting darker and impossibly darker, dark as 3 am. I cannot see to write. The world is ending, time is going backwards, we are plunging into night.

At last the sound of rain justifies it.

Oh my God, brutal wind, trees bowing, flailing.

And now still.

Is it the ceasing to be, so much as to be someone/somewhere/ sometime else?

My mother, in reading to me, passed on her love of (romantic) escape. Her love to leave behind the ununcomfortable, unsightly, messy realities for a world with tidy beginnings, middles, climaxes, and happy endings. Heroes, heroines, villains. Excitement, adventure, suspense.

Laura Ingalls Wilder was never for me. I had already been spoiled by "The Princess and the Goblin", and "Robin Hood."

So an interesting thing to tap: on becoming other.

And should it be seen as a way of manifesting those repressed aspects of self—becoming the many people we really are.

Or a 'transcendence' of self, into the LARGER world (as in death and spiritual experience) Or an engagement with the possible manifestations of one's larger inner self, or multiple selves.

Which, oddly—as collective unconscious—is perhaps just a different doorway to the same wider world. And for a writer, does it matter for any more than the ways in which is creatively and nurturingly useful?

Becky and I , always so drawn both to the Jungian and to the Buddhist credos.

THIS is something to sink my teeth into. An interesting min/world/space to explore. (Not to mention to use as a conceptual vehicle for another book.)

And how does it express itself in the mind. In music; writing; meditation, etc

—

What is my relationship to this world of characters?

What use have my notes been to me, either coded or uncoded.?

At the the **beginning** of the latest spurt of activity, I abstained from reading them, wanting to give myself the mental looseness for fresh perspectives.

Now?

Although I cleared out my cabin a few days ago, there are fresh bat-droppings. Like Creature, I scribble away with the sure knowledge of bats just a few feet overhead.

The rustling of the wind in the trees promises a woodsy sweetness to the air, but is instead delivering that steamy stench of warm swamp-mud.

Earliest pages of process-journal

(Note to the reader: these pages are in chronological sequence, not excerpted. Note that the character currently called 'Roonya' is earlier called 'gidget', 'squidge', and 'iruna'. In a couple of places, Creature is referred to as 'Ivan'.)

A TV show of boy who couldn't speak well (neurologic or palate prob?) who surprised everyone with 800 SAT math/science scores.

July 13, 1996

Science News story. Brain scans of stuttering (Vol 150). Stuttering sometimes vanishes with reading in unison singing or whispering.

1. *The Quill and the Sword (Staff)*
2. *The Quill and the Song*
3. *The Weaver's Web/The Ties that Bind/The Singing Web*

In which diff species are united. Birmba mind/speech Father Tree spirit (introducing a character who will be at the center of a book about tree and water spirits)

Her drawings came out of her with no more consideration than songs from a bird

Dec 31/97

Creature or The Creature

First person

Jem teaches him to read?

How does Jem suspect? Creature does something to save him form....Not once but twice)

Creature's love affair with words.

?

Like a walnut shell. Nothing showing. But maybe hypersensitive about what comes in.

'Creature' insulting? Other 'defectives' insulting?

What's happening in Maynor? People against people. Final resolution (Book#?) must mirror Island politics.

First person. Why?

Does Jem play music?

Does creature finally learn to talk by thinking musically?

Creature's contact with Ferrel

If 1st person, what is Leora's role? Leora has already found herself---she loses story interest. How can we generate tension between Leora and Creature if they're both psychic and can't misread each other?

If not 1st person, I could alternate between Leora and Creature.

Creature overhears new words, and hordes them like a squirrel does nuts

A chestnut looks like a brain. Creature is into metaphors.

Apr 18, 98

Book III Leora hurts her hand, and thinks it effects her psychism, etc. Discovers broader powers.

Book IV Leora as older woman. Hand has sprouted feathers.

?

In the second (or third) book, an obedience producing drug is introduced (father is being blackmailed, and thinking daughter(s) in custody, complies. But instantly, an antidote is (illegible) (gather has also introduced that)

Ivan (speech effect) (poet? musician?) Can memorize conversations. Can convince.

And Cassie's brother Jeb. Does he sing the song (and drum) Temper. Karate.

A Wiggala/Ivan connection?

Aug 2, 98

On the way over, they get spotted (by a boat?) Howie lets off then goes back out to get caught. Cassie and Leora continue. Or Leora thinks Cassie drowned. Or later, Leora thinks something happened to Cassie---so that when she gets to the Institute, she can't bring herself to say anything to Jem about Cassie, who is probably dead.

Meanwhile, something has happened to Leora's hand. Broken, or wrapped in plaster?

Cassie arrives as Institute Mistress. To separate Jem from the group she feigns fury, has him sent off (Leora's behaving strangely. Why is she winking, etc/)

Once alone with him, he loses his cool, attacks her (despite her club) and pins he to the ground
"The revolution could use a fighter like you"

\SWEEP OF THE BOOK

CREATURE becomes Wordsworth

explores language

reading/knowledge

instinctive trust

how complement?

turns him to poetry

and beauty

LEORA

doubt about her hand

finding father

broadens and deepens

connection to nature

what about her art?

gives martial arts,

meditation

from disregard to respect, fondness

JEM

goes from impulsive anger and bitterness

to channeled action, strategy, martial arts,

courage

from self pity to serving others

like Cassie, distrust is his specialty

Aug 4, 98

Cassie, disguised as a man, comes in extra mean, simultaneous w. Leora

The boys see them in close friendly conversation with each other and don't trust.

Or maybe they have already (are coming) come to trust Leora when Cassie arrives, and are suspicious.

Howie, as a runaway trail chopper, is the most recognized and endangered.

Jem wears his feelings on his face, and has to be kept from the truth longer.

WE don't know the nasty thin man on the scene is Cassie

Leora has to keep a low (coward-like) profile because that is the position from which she can best keep her cover.

Aug. 5, 98

Ferrel, imprisoned in same building, is supposed to be concocting obedience drug. It is being tested on the children, so after some mutual suspicion, he has the kids pretend to be drugged. Maybe, before he reunites with Leora at the end, he opts not to escape, and be transported further south (or stay) because he can continue to help the rebels from that position. And Leora finds him in the next book)or this book?)

?

Leora's father had books from the Before Time. They were taken after his death. How did they know he had them? (or after Mrs. B's marriage)

The old knowledge is forbidden of course. Maybe the rulers have 'knowers' under their thumb. The Knowers have freedom of knowledge, but are otherwise permanent slaves. Each Knower is only allowed one area of knowledge.

?

Leora's section of the book begins with dove message? (if re-unite in end)
Renamed North Maynor (or East Maynor) or Maine. or Mayne.
as opposed to South Maynor

?

The Creature first introduces himself as Wordsworth when he meets Leora (Physical contact with hand? And therefore trusting her.) Name startles Jem. As well as Leora, who intuited otherwise. Her obvious surprise makes Jem suspicious. In fact her intuiting and knowing too much continues to make him suspicious.

Whether to trust Leora or not is a bone of contention between Jem and Creature.

Or: is Leora undergoing a crisis, thinking she's lost her powers because her hand is hurt and wrapped. (Can't draw) Or, is it NOT hurt, just wrapped as disguise.

Ferrel has been newly placed in the Institute to test his work on the inmates.

The gov't in South Maynor has no idea that the North has fallen (besides, they are distracted by trouble with the nation to their southern border.

Ferrel's contact with 'Nell' by dove. So Ferrel knows North has fallen/been won!
(p.s.--when do WE learn that scientist who boys meet is Ferrel?)

Maybe Creature is mute, but recovers his ability to speak in a moment of crisis "NO!" warning someone.

Plus, he (used to)drools

Part of his growing vocabulary is due to circumnavigating certain words by using others

If familiar birmbas are on south side, how did they get there?

Stutterer or mute? (but recovers voice)

Creature is crossing forbidden boundaries between knowledge.

At first, Institute children are not connected to each other? Or at least not political. But the combination of Creature's new sense of history and Jem's leadership abilities politicizes them.

We, if not they, need to come to see the 'gifts' of their 'defects'.

Creature introduces Ferrel to hidden stash of books (allowing him to do his antidote trick?) Or does his having the drug at all raise the issue of 'why not use it on the guards? immoral?

"So you DO have a name!"

One of the boys sees, meets, Wiggala with a necklace of buttons, perhaps on an escape reconnaissance. (Gives him something shiny? Which Leora sees later?)

Jan 2, 99

Note: In Hermit Thrush:

at personal level: she becomes connected to own gift weakness to strength.

at emotional level: lonely to connected

other person level: finds sister (who represents past and family)

nation-level: from separateness to together oppression to freedom

In Book II: a Central Metaphor: BUILDING A BRIDGE between North and South
between present and past: knowledge, books
between people,

JEM

Suspicion is what keeps him from connecting to others--had been betrayed by a friend--
and feels betrayed by sister.

Self-pity. Distrusts others, as well as own emotions. He becomes empowered by
channeling anger into action, strategy, courage

CREATURE: from silent unspoken to articulate

from not counting, to counting

Is it he who helps build the bridge---of words, knowledge--to past (p.s., between
Moran and daughter, between Knowers, etc

Maybe it is he who helps build the actual Bridge, with tech from books, or ideas

Maybe Leora had intended to cut her hair for further disguise, but got caught first (But is her
hand already bandaged?)

Nobody in the Institute trust anybody. Are children forced to tell on each other? Or is it that
they come and go so often that they don't bother to bond.?

A little big-eyed silent girl, short legs (no knees) bald, big head. Bangs her head on the wall?
Someone notices the rhythm. No ears? No tongue? Or mind of a 3 year old? or very wise. Into
touching? Slits for ears. No ability to process language, but can play music--to which Creature
can sing without stuttering.

Why do I keep hearing this in first person (Creature)? How about written as a diary, where there
is no stuttering. But, how about Leora's point of view. The diary could be, "He wrote:...."
POINT OF VIEW is big question.

Ferrel has discovered some miscellaneous balms, etc--like for healing sores that Jem acquires
from fight, beating, blow, whatever.

Building the bridge as culmination ?

Nob River has changed, goes deeper into Maine, since disaster?
Wherever the birmbas go over in the first place.

Does Jem go out (w. Creature) to reconnoiter? Meets Wiggala?

Who are the bad people in the Institute?

Is Wilfert in this book?

Whose family adopts gidget?

Who was her real family?

Creature has to put together diff strains of knowledge. Geography and bridge building?
Or put together different Knowers

Jan 5, 99

(They) hear somebody in the attic. Is it Ferrel? Or does it turn out to be one of the Institute tenders, watchers, matrons, or the 'blob' (who has a streak of curiosity).

A book about secrets (and suspicion)

The image of a branching tree, roots.

People curious about where they came from. Leora/father, Creature.

A bride of floats, which is detached if an enemy approaches.

One of the devices by which the north wins over the people of the south is letting people find out who their relatives are (branching tree)

A character: silent, neckless, supposedly retarded. But Leora puts her hand on (it) and learns X.
Or is it a relative of the matron. Maybe they keep it alive because they have a superstition about bad luck.

Does SUPERSTITION play a role in this book (as opposed to knowledge. But then what am I saying about intuition?)

What is the larger SHAPE of the book. When do they get out of the Institute? And then what? Remember that the Institute exists because people reject abnormal. Should they encounter this blindness/cruelty in the outer world as Well? Is it resolved? Or 'people will always....'

Is there a general difference between the north and the south?

Do we meet some Knowers? Where do they stand between obedience/disobedience secrets/knowledge x/curiosity disconnected/connected

Some key person might turn out to be the abandoned rejected offspring of someone in power (a Ruler, Wilfert, a knower, a matron)

Jan 6, 99

Advantage of 1st person allows me to identify with a boy, otherwise difficult. A Diary?

I think I have to surrender this book to itself.

Or maybe write it in 1st person for Creature, then change it to third person later.

Maybe the Institute has 'guest rooms' for visitors, travelers. Such as Knowers. Or is the Institute a building connected to a gov't. bldg.

Jan 7, 99

My need for wonder, magic, beauty, how does it get taken care of in the Institute? The attic is the place with a sense of place. Does it have a room with a view?

Is Creature logos to Leora's intuition?

Squidge is Creatch's life-line. Also speechless. But he can talk to her without stuttering because she is deaf.

She plays music to which he can sing?

Does he read aloud to her?

Does it turn out that someone else is secretly listening? The blob? Jem/

Maybe the attic is Creatch's secret. And Ferrel is Jem's (P.s. and we can't wait for them to TELL each other, because Moran needs the books. Also, this is one reason to have Jem's pt of view included. This play has major structural implications)

At the point of resistance, Creatch refuses to talk to Jem out of shame for the stutter. A turning point, when he decides to.

Maybe each has a 'bad' secret. Jem's is that it was his fault that his sister's secret was blown. And by now, they certainly will have caught her

How to incorporate the fact Ferrel is in contact with the rebels. But he has no reason to tell Jem this, if Jem doesn't tell him about his own past. (p.s. How does dove know from where to where to go? Does Ferrel know that his contact is on an island?)

Is learning about the rebels and therefore his sister's (possible) existence, a turning point? Giving Jem a reason to train his mind?

Ferrel having been moved to the Institute must be very recent. Or he must not have immediately told the rebels. Or dove relay problem. Because otherwise they wd be in immediate contact with Jem. For security, they give each other no unnecessary extractable information.

Cassie's voice: "speaks deeper, gruffer than his voice really is, as if to make up for his small size"

Does one of the rulers, or knowers or matrons secretly have a defective growing up in hiding?

The swirling whiteness outside seemed had become a funneled whirlwind within him (Jem) concentration the force of the light, and rushing in through his feet and fanning out through him. Anything seemed possible. Or, it seemed as if in some place beyond the details of the real world, everything was already well.

Is it not quite consistent for Creatch to be both fact-fiend and poet?

When he introduces himself as Wordsworth, has he actually cracked the cover (read) the book.

Maybe he is a dreamer, and introduces JEM to the library---building the bridge.

What of Cassie's and Jem's family? Ignore them? Or should they figure in the book (remember they brought up 'Nell') They must be an embittered (sarcastic or wry in the first place) couple. Jem can't just be obsessed with his sister (conflicted (who betrayed whom) Wouldn't he also remember his family?

Before Jem and Creatch connect, one of them has to make the attempt, and be rebuffed. Maybe Jem, having heard Creatch talk, tries to talk to him and gets only silence, because Creatch doesn't want to stutter.

Although it was the matrons long ago who beat Creatch for stuttering, matrons have come and gone, and he has been silent for so long, no one knows he can talk.

Maybe he wears his hair long to cover his mis-match eye, or crooked jaw. Pulls it back in a ponytail to read.

"I didn't know you had a face."

Squidge is still there because no one wanted someone who was deaf to orders.

Jem doesn't relate to others because he's been burned by connecting to his friend long ago, and burned by connecting to children who get shipped out. But he also thinks of himself as the only Normal one. A realization

Maybe Creatch sees him as a hot-head and a surly sulk. Or maybe Creatch, feeling inhuman himself, judges on one. (P.S.---How long till reader realizes Creatch's actual state. Begin with Jem's perspective on Creatch? Or from C's perspec)

Title: where the Rivers Meet (join) Metaphor of common connected knowledge. People together not separate.

Jem's issue is trust. Channeling power to a purpose. Superiority (vs humility)
Creatch's is that he isn't even a member of the human race. Silence. Private world.

Title: The Roots of the Beech (oak, Tree)
Where the branches divide

Leora: So you do have a (real) name?

Jem: What made you think he didn't?

(Later: She's a spy. (Maybe there had been one sometime in the past, strengthening J's mistrust. Or maybe kids were spying on each other all the time, out of fear, etc.)

So they don't tell her about Ferrel?

Or is Ferrel a red herring?

Or should his identity be saved for another book?

Title: some creature, or fact, which 'crosses' disciplines From some book (a real one?) which postulates x. Some piece of knowledge, field of understanding, dependent on many perspectives.

A title which is about many perspectives. "Windows on the World." Too broad.

Maybe there is some action dependent on their combined strengths:

Leora: Visual

Creatch Verbal

Jem Kinesthetic

Squintch: Audio

Remember their internal vocabulary should reflect this!!!!

Maybe Creatch goes ballistic when he hears that someone's 'defect' is going to be 'fixed'. Maybe he defends others' selfhood, dignity, identity, before his own

Jan 8, 99

Creatch find a dictionary

Are there any mirrors?

What does he see when he finally sees himself?

Needing a framework within the context of which freedom is meaningful.

Stories in which two points of view have worked: Princess and the Goblin. Goat Island

Maybe the book begins as a batch of defectives are being 'slaved' out of the Institute. The Creature looks around and takes stock of who's left.

There was no way of knowing what things were like out there (Certainly) no one ever came back to tell any tales)

Maybe inmates get sent to clean the quarters of...
Do they learn valuable secrets?

The slavers: how about that one. He looks normal
"You wouldn't want him.. Besides we need some one around her that can obey orders, understand orders. Do the heavy work."
"They wouldn't like it if they knew you were holding out on them."
"No one's going to tell them, are they."

Do the matrons know that creature can hear? Understands some, but retarded?

"How about this one?"
'It's got no ears."
"Can it take orders?"

No

"Good for nothing then. I'd get rid of it if I were you."
Creature knew they wouldn't do that. They used her to tend a tiny garden out back in the summertime. And she and nobody else had been able to coax plump tomatoes out of the otherwise barren soil of the matron's garden. Not that they had ever tasted the fruit.

Some name other than 'matron', denoting male and female. The keepers?

Problem: Where have the defectives been before the Institute? The keepers surely don't 'do' babies. Are parents forced to care for them?(Conflicts with anything in HT?)Do parents hide them secretly till discovered? Is there another facility?

Creature notes the words people use, and the way they put them together.

What is Creature's relationship to his feelings? Heartache, which he has learned to ignore. Silent language. "Stop it. Stop it!" "Hush" he said to the voice inside. If he had said it out loud, it would have out st-st-st-st He hadn't spoken out loud for longer than he could remember. Even the keepers didn't know he could talk, so many of them had come and gone since the first keepers who beat him for his stammer.

Does Creature know if he would stammer now? Does he discover that he doesn't stammer with

S? Or already know that.

Who has taught him to read? Maybe Jem, long ago (either directly or while teaching someone else)

Does Creature already know about the books before the story begins?

Remember that fear of the birmbas is an issue with this whole population

Creature has figured (figures) out that S is sensitive to tones. Maybe he develops a private language with her which is tone-based.

Stutterer, by Marty Jezer.

A story about the difference between opting for isolation (and safety) and for connection (ridicule)

Jezer, p. 2. reading aloud to self, singing, and talking to pets
Muscle tension--jaw, neck, teeth clamp, explosive gestures.

Most 10%, some 80%

Jezer, p. 79-80 how others use words as control, defense, etc. IMPORTANT concept.
p.84--shame of being identified as stutterer (so Creatch would be much more humiliated by speech defect than by retardedness.

Creatch introduces Jem to Yoga? Meditation? Who suggest to C that it might be useful for stuttering,

Creation of alter-self, fluent

Hoagland essays?

Maybe in disguise, C. stops stuttering (being someone else)

Writing would be the obvious thing for a stutterer. First person.

Hoagland, 'The final fate of Alligators, and Heart's Desire

Knotted Tongues by Benson Bobrick

p. 31--description of appearance

p. 139 quote Hoagland

153, 154, 184, experience of Hoagland

Stuttering, by Bloodstein. Has specific e.g.s of whole word repetition. p. 143

Finds maps of a good bridge site (nautical?) (But has geography changed?)

X seeing Wiggala with necklace that Margarita had made. Tells Leora. It was Wiggala! He must have crossed!

A nitwit--or some other word, made-up, meaning retarded, so as not to use that word.

"Can't stand those eyes. See right through you. Don't know how a nitwit can have eyes like that." (that look)

When Cassie identifies herself, Jem hits her even harder.

Maybe Creature has trouble getting out the first word, twisting his tongue, grunting, etc---Like a wounded beast. But that done, he can talk.

Like a clam. Clammed up. What was a clam?

Mar 25, 99

Maybe even the reader doesn't know it's Leora who arrives.

Arm in bandage

Maybe the way secret ones out is that the Inst. matron takes the bandage off, insisting that Leora is malingering.

See "Notes on the political backdrop for the sequel to Hermit Thrush"

Apr 15, 99

When Jem first confronts Creatch with the fact that he can speak, Creatch grunts and gobbles.

Jem thinks he's faking, feels rebuffed, and furious.

June 22, 99

What is the end, the objective, of the book? Building a bridge?

What is the final, most suspenseful, struggle, challenge?

Are defectives to be put to death?

Or a particular one? Rooney?

Maybe Creatach manages to get 'sold' to a Ruler's house.

But all the threads must come together

Burning of books? (too like other fire?)

Spreading plague?

Killing defectives?

Giving an experimental disease to defectives?

As for rebels, what are their objectives?

Take the south?

Establish own gov't.?

School for all children?

What is their strategy?

If rulers plan to retake north, how do they plan to transport themselves? Bridge or boat.

Was old bridge from before?

The sound of laughter becoming commoner.

Song.

Mix of face colors.

Eating new fish.

(ps. going between villages, birmbas, etc)

If guardsmen are unaware of peaceful nature of birmbas, how about Rulers?

How do rebels guard their (watery) borders?

A new disease? Crafted by another scientist. (how does that scientist feel?)

Something Moran figures a prevention (or cure?) for

Moran experiments on himself? (story possibilities here. He gets very ill. Or behaves not himself (causing terrible consternation to boys)

Guards end up hoist by their own petard (again?) eating the tainted food intended for the rebels.

(I can see it happening: a ditto of my story-line and devices.

Maybe Creatch finds his father. A knower? A ruler? Who thought him dead? Sold him off? Or knew his whereabouts? (Book III)

Maybe a shorter book which ends with escape from Institute. And Bridge.

And following book with Creatch infiltrating Ruler's or Knower's home as servant. Who turns out to be his father?

Or who he knows is his father, and gets himself placed there.

If so, Moran (if included will be a sleeper for 3rd book (huh?)

In Book II, do they capture S. Maynor? Or merely escape to plot if or Book III?

"oh Rooney, roony, Rooney." Crumpled over, he rocked, his eyes and nose running, his chin slippery with saliva.

Jem had once tried to help Creatch in some way, and C (trying to thank him) had turned red and emitted a terrible yowl. Jem had steered clear of him after that.

The point is in the relationship, points and counterpoint, of the 2 boys.

Jem feels peoples/ presence, proximity, with his body. Has physical reactions.
A kinesthetic. Motion, weight, feel, texture.

Maybe oddens make rope out of vine as an occupation. And begin twining it for a bridge.

Maybe they bag sand/gravel in a pit out back.

Mistress, etc are often busy tending to knowers, etc. And maybe to a favored (secret) odd'n.

Get books on institutions for the retarded. History of orphanages.

Get file-maker pro

Get Coulter's homeopathic profiles

Read up on genetic and acquired (but remediable neurological diseases. (Epilepsy, etc.)

Maybe Creature gets his name partly from his seizures.

Befriending mice, and loosing them on matron

It is a surprise to the boys to discover that the Plant Knower is a prisoner.

Creatch (or Jem) has given up on letting himself get attached to other inmates, as the most recent batch gets shipped out once again.

Iruna's arrival, and her worming her way into his affections. (Apr 30)

How to get the birmbas in earlier? Iruna gets a nightly visitor? (Mar 4)

Jem's all output, action (and re-action)

Creatch is all reception

Jem moves to consideration before action. To proper channeling of action.

Creatch comes to realize that his actions can affect the outer world.

How do mistresses enforce order over such as Jem? Weapon? A brute servant?

Maybe Creatch and Jem are hidden in a dark small box or closet while the buyers are choosing(?) children to take.

Do they leave Iruna (Inevitably leaving her to some form of disposal, gradual starvation, exposure to the elements, something unknown, disappearance) Or does Iruna arrive later. How? Deposited there. By whom? Someone we meet later?

'Learned helplessness model" (Michael Murray's Encyclopedia under depression) a model for Creatch?

Creatch and Jem in basement at beginning. Jem (temper) is bound and gagged. Creatch is simply there.

Creatch, to Jem's surprise unties him?

Do we hear voices of buyers upstairs? Voices of Mistress? (an opportunity for explanation)

Irana:

There all along, but boys awaken to her?
Brought by buyers? Or returned?
Delivered shortly after buyers?

Creatch's thing will be the uniting of knowledge.

Does he have a capacity for holism.

The ability to take in the interconnectedness of the whole scene at a time? (Or maybe this is Moran's job)f

What sort of metaphors would he use?

How has he adapted to only taking in, never communicating outwards.

Is the story partly about his move from acceptance/adaptation to stirring desire/necessity to contact?

May 31, 99

What would the Rulers want to do about the North?
punish and control.

How?

Disease or drugs?

Amputations? (not so as to make them useless as slaves)

Brand their faces? (One rebel thus scarred, at first ashamed, then proud. Decorates it)

Irana playing with Creatch's hair--at some point make him presentable

Jem remembering Creatch hovering beside him when he taught x to read long ago.

Creatch remembering Jem teaching x to read)

Creatch staying behind to 'protect' the books from destruction.

Cassie learns that Institute residents get sold off.

One of the neighbors of Maynor is even worse: kills its defectives at birth (thus imports Maynor's) it's ODDONES

What do they keep the inmates busy doing?

The first step is they begin communication w each other.
Jem and Creatch (Roonya--sign language?) taught by R?

They organize.

What's the central Metaphor?

For HT:

Leora connects darkness with light she 'sings'--comes into own connects diff peoples HT sings
Freedom

Creatch connects areas of knowledge (So what? What does this make possible?)

From silent intake to creative output.

Maybe there is a terrible illness which he can help cure. (Or maybe the illness is ignorance)

Maybe Rulers maintain power through separation of Knowers

Maybe Rulers have unleashed an illness (mutated or real?)

All their knowledge is narrowly funneled for Power and Evil.

Maybe it gets out of hand. And Rulers need connected knowledge to survive

Do Rulers emphasize research on causing death, as opposed to healing a very real illness (spread from where? and how?)

Maybe malnutrition?

What is the structure of power?

Is one of the Ruler's actually questioning it? Already, or eventually?

Where do guards come from?

Someone in power has a defective child. Hidden in their own place? Or kept secretly, in style, at the Institute.

Iruna? Or other?

If Iruna, Creatch teaches her to converse (sign or sound)

If other, perhaps a neurological disorder which a supplement heals
(ps. maybe better if Iruna's state is a gift, not something to fix.

What is the nature of the world beyond Maynor? How separated? What is relationship?
How far away?

Religious zealots, for e.g.

(Remember that Rulers were already fighting to the South. What about? Power or ideology?

June 25, 99

Jem to Creach: "You can understand, can't you?"

Does Moran know about rebels taking the North? If not, why not?

If so, his identity as Ferrel is somehow pre-viewed by his knowledge. Who else would know?

Perhaps it makes him suspect.

Perhaps he asked not to know too much.

Maybe Rooney is the matron's daughter. (ps no)

or the daughter of someone important who dies, so she reverts to regular population.

Dream: a few young children play harmonica, etc, a la Bosstones, Thanking them and saying good-by, I see they are joined and followed by a second tier, or semi-normals (a dwarf, etc) and a third tier of (blind?) unclothed, stone-smooth, groping 'preemies"--or rather fetus-like, but child size

Maybe one of their neighbors is entirely populated by this fetus-like creature. closer to a nuclear plant? New Hampshire?

Or they abound in one village (which was hiding them) and they have been rounded up and brought to the Institute, where they make wine.

June 25, 99

(Closing his eyes), he could feel (knew) everyone in the room at once (how they interconnected. Expand on this, be specific (Less kinesthetic, that's for Jem) He understands about relationships between things. Music would be a joy to him (ps. or maybe none of this. Just words, and eloquence)

His blind spot in this interconnectedness of people is HIMSELF.

So often treated as non-existent, he had come to assume that at some level he did not exist in the same way as others. He played no part in it at all. A fly on the wall.

How does he feel about not being able to speak?

Maybe at first he has no inner speech to others. Suddenly he finds words forming in his mind

and is stymied by the gap.

Roonya he speaks to. Is that first? and leads to other inner speech?

Does he speak in words to himself?: "Like a....," he thought.

Deer, freezing, ears erect, tail flashing.. Then a sort of snort. A threat? A warning to little ones in woods?. Another snort as she charged away into the woods.

Read the Thesaurus.

Creatch read the Thesaurus.

Inconvenient not to have a name. He has to be given the name creatch early in the book. Or Creature.

They don't cut his hair, because once they did and he fell to the floor, frothing at the mouth. (When he has a seizure around Rooney, she sits by him, all concerned. Perhaps she comes to be able to warn him, like dogs.

Perhaps one of their neighbors has almost exclusively men-child--sent off to be guards in Maynor.

All descended from one mutation. They have many children, trying to have one female (which might be a good deal for females, but they are constantly pregnant, exhausted, die young, have several husbands.

So maybe that nation decides to kidnap (women? or men for breeding?)

Would they be on the lookout for good 'material' in the Institute?

How would these guards be brought up? In families? In Institutes of their own?

They are traded for food? money? land?

Creature sees that all societies are impoverished(?) shaped (?) by some form of exclusion, (Miss)-prioritization, stratification. As well as by power dictates &/or survival dictates.

Maybe the male-only society rose out of multiple mutations--pre-disaster, from eating genetically altered food or animals.

Creature sees the inter relationship of diff nation states.

If he hadn't been so fierce, there would have been something comical about the little man with his huge black mustache (beard) which he patted and stroked from time to time. Creatch feared what the man might feel compelled to do to make up for his slight stature. A dandy, a real dandy, thought Creatch. He looked at mistress to see if she was impressed.

Maybe Cassie does something (fake) to Leora, which makes Jem explode.

"DIS-cipline," shouted the little man, clapping his stick against his hand as he strode. "DIS-cipline."

Do inmates make efforts to escape? If so, what happened. If not, why not? (Birmbas?)

The Box. (a coffin?.) Solitary confinement.

The question of Evil.

What is its face

Stages from pure altruism, compassion love, through selfishness, through a true belief in one's mean creed (ignorance) through cruelty for its own sake.

Can Wilfert be redeemed, belonging to the last? Short of a near death experience, a blow to the head, probably not.

Read about interconnectedness: Aquarian Age, Tao of Physics, Naturalists' books

Read about epilepsy

Mistress had some primitive fear of his fits. Might it be contagious. Might he bite her. Might he have some supernatural power

It is Moran who name it as epilepsy

Moran's joy at finding books, and his fear they'll be burned

A public hanging of two knowers who worked together. And/or someone who was found to have books. (Maybe Moran had found some (where? hidden back at the Village. Where he learned....

The three types: Hotspur, Falstaff, Henry

The three kids. (?) Their wonder at finding a map of the world.

June 30, 99

As I walk on the road this sweet morning, the road damp and the leaves beaded with dew, I am not called to write about a miserable mute boy in a cruel and oppressive institution.

The whole problem of saying the specifics of what I see (smell, feel, etc) rather than a vague abstract noun.

Like meditation.

Limit, form, definition, shape vs. floating, wide sweep of intuition, grace. But of course its the alternation. Until the bend in the road, I will throw back my shoulders, and let my body and lungs take in the sweet breeze. Then I will concentrate and ask for help.

Maybe Creature's outward appearance and definition is defined by people looking at him and talking about him.

Writing: a process of contraction and expansion. Footwork and dreaming. Like a hawk, I am floating over the territory, circling, circling, waiting. Still in the stage of casting a wide net.

Is my reluctance to type out my notes, even, the result of an inner understanding that it its too soon to 'contract'

Lice.

Title: from Wordsworth. Or Houseman