

Article 11 – Turning Point

The 'writing' habit has formed. We still the unwanted voices in our head with journalising; we have our synopsis, character sketches, chapter breakdown; we plan our writing day into our diary, just like any other appointments. On a therapeutic level, we are recognising our own driving emotions, and those that get in our way, and we are dealing with them. As writers our empathic capabilities are growing, and our characters are deepening, their motivations becoming more complex, and yet paradoxically more logical.

Before long we will have reached the middle of the novel, and BLANK, it all dries up. The next chapter just doesn't make sense any more. It is at this point, (for me at around chapter 3 or 4) that many writers will, after struggling and failing to write that next chapter, just toss the unfinished manuscript aside. Others will by some feat of willpower, manage to write the next chapter, as laid out in their chapter breakdown, and continue writing this novel, but with an ever diminishing sense of achievement, only to finish the novel, knowing that it is only mediocre. It has turned out to be a much blander story than that original, brilliant vision. The characters, initially so full of potential have faded into two dimensional banality, carrying out their assigned tasks with little vitality or originality.

What has happened? Quite simply, at a point in the novel where the characters are on the verge of truly coming to life, the writer has imposed his will upon these unfolding individuals, and denied them their authenticity. The writer, afraid himself of taking the plunge, chooses to box his characters in and try to tame them. These futile attempts will either kill the story, or make it at the very least superficial. The characters will lose their credibility. Because we as writers hold on to the belief that we are in charge and that the characters, invented by us, brought to life by us, can do only that which we tell them to do, we rob ourselves of the greatest gift of all. We rob ourselves of an opportunity to truly create.

Despite journalising and owning our emotions we can still sabotage our writing. By not wholly believing in the organic growth process that our writing can go through we will never move on from the mediocre to the original and maybe even genial.

A truly wonderful writer, one that inspires and touches his reader, must first trust the power of creation. He must, figuratively, hold the pen in his hand and let the muse take over.

So there you are, at chapter three, your literary crossroads. Whether you are truly conscious of it or not, three choices await you. Do you give in to the despair and the frustration and just quit? Do you, ignoring all the previous steps, force your will upon the story and the characters, and mechanically 'get this story over and done with'? Or do you take a huge leap of faith, and accept the greatest gift that writing can offer you and allow your characters to come to life?

When I was finally able to go for the last of these, it was as if all the lights went on. Being able to let go of my original notions of who my characters were, and how they would react in any given situation, was exhilarating. What had until then been an unnameable driver in my writing, now became clear. I too wanted and needed to learn more about human nature. I too wanted and needed to understand behaviour. My initial driver – my need to tell others what I had already discovered – was now strengthened by my desire to take the journey with my reader.

But as I discussed in detail in my other articles, I am not going to be able to 'let go' and enjoy the characters I have created unless I have owned the wide spectrum of emotions that make up my own personality, unless I am comfortable with these emotions. My fear will prevent me.

You might think that this is all far removed from what we think are the difficulties and challenges we will encounter when we choose to write, but I truly believe that great writing comes, not from knowing the grammatical constructions, and having the vocabulary to tell a story. For me, great writing comes from the heart, the soul even.

Fiction cannot exist without 'characterisation'. Not true you might think, but have you ever read a book where there is no characterisation? Great writing dares to take the plunge into the depths of human

nature. Or as in *Watership Down* or *Animal Farm*, into the depths of animal nature. And I am sure there are stories with inanimate objects as focal point. But they are still driven by characterisation. We either use people in our stories, or we assign human characteristics to whatever we choose as focal point in our fiction.

The only course of action, when you reach this 'turning point' in your story, is to be patient and courageous. Continue to dig deep into your own emotional makeup using the tools we mentioned in earlier articles. Now it is more important to wait for the truth of the character to emerge, rather than forcing it to fit into a preconceived mould.

It is not the plot that is in danger at this stage. It is not even the closing sentence or the concluding scene. It is how you get there. And the first hurdle (or opportunity for new vision) to getting there is whether or not you allow your characters to truly come to life.

Don't now jump in and try to rewrite all the subsequent chapters in the light of your new discoveries. Choose now to 'go with the flow' for a couple of chapters. Use them as a 'loose' guideline, but enjoy the journey. Enjoy the discovery.