

## 8. Sensuality

This article will be more difficult for me to write than were the other articles. This article will consider the aspect that I myself have had the most difficulty in understanding. The mechanisms I will try to describe here are ones that require strength of spirit to come to terms with. Dealing with these mechanisms and digging even deeper in the search for your best creative self demands that you take on board all aspects of your emotional self. Also, when you have read this article and absorbed what I have attempted to say, then please do add your own opinions on this process. If I have left out anything significant or if I have said something that you do not agree with, then please say so. In this area, I don't think we are ever done learning and improving and growing as creative beings.

Writing is a sensual activity. It engages the higher senses - the five basic emotions: joy, sorrow, anger, fear, and sexual feeling. In order to write the best we can, we must face ALL of these emotions. In our society, mistakenly, we have labelled some emotions 'good' and others 'bad'. We are prepared to admit to the 'good' emotions but spend a lot of time and energy denying the 'bad', resulting in poor writing, non-authentic writing, or worse still, in writer's block.

The usually accepted 'good' emotions are joy, sexual feelings (sometimes) and sorrow (though this must be borne stoically). The bad feelings are anger, fear, and again sexual feelings (when judged to be inappropriate). But unless we own all of these we can hardly be expected to create three dimensional, believable characters or to empathise. We cannot put them into conflict situations that test their strengths and their weaknesses.

But more importantly, if we are in the business of denial, it will seep into our work, and have the same paralysing effect as those other, internalised voices that live in our head. Paradoxically, if we were not 'emotional' 'sensual' people, we would probably not even have the urge to write fiction. We would not be curious enough, or restless enough, or passionate enough. Living in denial would wear us out.

Consider this: it is the spirit fighting to break through the conscious denial that drives us to become writers. It is the need to peel away layer after protective layer of non-authentic behaviour and the hunger for the truth that motivates us to put pen to paper. It is the unwillingness to accept that 'this is all there is' that awakens our curiosity and passion.

Yet, if we are unaware of this process and imagine ourselves to be able to write meaningful fiction while living superficially, the anger, fear, and all the other 'bad' feelings will creep into the writing, making it heavy and laborious. And as long as we are unable to own those feelings, as long as we fail to recognise them as part of ourselves, then we cannot contain them. We will not be able to take a step back from them, dilute them if necessary, and reproduce them in an appropriate manner; one that enhances instead of diminishes the quality of the writing.

A friend of mine once said to me, after reading *The Cloths of Heaven*, that I failed to have Sheila say a 'proper' goodbye on any of the occasions when she had to leave her family, and that I had the tendency to have people die a lot. She also said that by not having proper 'goodbyes' – even those who died did so alone – I missed out on an opportunity to empathise with the sad and lonely. Yet because I was not empathising with the bereaved, I, almost obsessively, repeatedly gave myself an opportunity to do so. She also pointed out that I, in my own life, had been forced to say 'goodbye' more often than I would have liked. In her opinion, I tended to be hard on myself in those situations, and not allow myself to experience real grief and loneliness. Obviously I needed to recognise this aspect of my own life so that I could learn to say goodbye appropriately, and my spirit, through my writing, was telling me so. But, as I had not yet owned it, I was not able to deal with it adequately in my writing. She said it stuck out like a sore thumb because it lacked authenticity. It was hard to take this on board, but I did. Then I was able to return to *The Cloths of Heaven*, and recognise how hard it must have been for Sheila to constantly have to say 'goodbye' and how distraught she would have been when those she loved died. I was then able to write about these feelings in a way that engaged the reader and kept them bound to the story.

In my case I had trouble with grief, and my writing gave me the opportunity to come to terms with it.

More commonly, anger is seen as the least attractive emotion to own. I think that anger, when not owned and out of control, creates the type of fiction that slaps you in the face. When anger is owned it can be the driver for courage, and acts of bravery and valour. When denied and overly controlled it creates depressive, lethargic fiction.

But in order for anger to be used effectively in fiction it has to be an emotion that you are familiar with not one that engulfs you, and enslaves you. Anger needs to be worked out, outside of your fiction, so that when you need it in your stories, you are in charge of it, and not the other way around.

Anger can be worked out in journals, in letters written (not necessarily dispatched), and more physically through sport. You can also retreat to a private place and pummel a pillow, or bury your head in it and just yell! Just feel it! Go through it, overcome your trepidation and be angry. Experience its rise and its subsequent fall and in the process master it.

The last emotion we need to face is fear. The previous article about the voices in our head that need to be stilled is where our fear comes from. Fear comes in many forms, and all of them stem from what others have told us about the world, and about ourselves. We fear rejection, criticism, and ridicule. All of these things come from others. If we learn to accept ourselves (sometimes called self-love) then we have nothing to fear. Only when we do not accept ourselves and are dependent on the approval of others, is there room for fear to creep in.

As a supplement to this article I would recommend you read Debbie Ford – The Dark Side of the Light Chasers. This non fiction work talks about denied emotions, not-owned emotions and the various mechanisms the human psyche has created in order to bring these to the surface.