

Blessed by Burden

Abstract: This research paper was written for the capstone course, "Dialogues in the Humanities," HUMN 2440. The assignment was to examine a topic that deals with the way humans tell stories. I chose to examine the correlation between creativity and mental illness, because emotions affect storytelling. Intrigued by the high number of suicides and mental illness among writers, I reviewed a number of studies and the opinions of authors to discover for myself why and how creativity and mental illness are linked. A literature review of peer reviewed articles and scholarly books provide information about the history of creativity and madness, the correlation between creativity and mood disorders, and offer insight into the struggle of writers balancing creativity and mood disorders. Writers must find a way to use highs and lows of mood to their creative advantage without letting their moods create obstacles in their lives.

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The creative mind is fascinating and misunderstood. Conflicting research exists in the realms of creativity and mental health. An exploration of the mystery behind the eyes of writers reveals deep thinkers, brilliant minds, successful storytellers, and distorted thinking. Writers walk a fine line between the expression and exploration of creativity and mental illness as they ride the waves of highs and lows of moods. Whether it is a gift from the gods or a mental idiosyncrasy, creativity is a blessing and a burden.

Fade in. A writer works diligently on his next masterpiece. What do you see? Perhaps, an author downing copious amounts of caffeine as he writes in a coffee house, or an author alone in a cluttered, secluded space struggling to find the right words. Eric Maisel, author of *The Van Gogh Blues* provides a description of his life as a novelist early in his career “smoking two-and-a-half packs of cigarettes a day, and [frequenting] coffeehouses and pubs in Dublin, London, Paris, Budapest, Greenwich Village, San Francisco, and other existential locales” (xi). Cigarettes, coffee, alcohol, and exciting locations are often associated with writers. Writers are often viewed as enjoying a carefree lifestyle as they function under the influence of various substances. The life of a writer is far more complicated than the simple stereotypes in which writers are perceived.

The idea that a writer produces work while influenced by alcohol, caffeine, or drugs while socializing in amazing places diminishes the fact that writing is an art. In “Writers and Day-Dreaming,” Sigmund Freud explains that writers liberate the tensions of the minds of audiences allowing them to enjoy their own personal daydreams without repulsion. Freud argues that writers provide aesthetic appeal to the mind by altering and disguising the writer’s own egoistic daydream (Freud 153). A common misconception is that writers produce work without

effort. However, writers spend a great deal of time perfecting and completing poems, stories, and scripts.

Writing serves as an expression, escape, and treatment. D.H. Lawrence explains, “One sheds one’s sickness in books, repeats and presents again one’s emotions to be master of them” (qtd. in Berman). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe used poetry to reflect on his life events (Hofmann, Holm-Hudulla, and Roussel). Virginia Woolf “viewed art as the best antidote to depression; her treatment of choice was to immerse herself in fiction” (qtd. in Berman). Writing allows authors to take time to reflect on all their ideas. Pen and paper do not judge or taunt. Every idea is safe in the margins of paper.

The work completed by writers is often done in solitude. Thus, writers have obtained the stereotype of being eccentric, solitary creatures. For example, Johnny Depp’s character, Mort Rainey, in *Secret Window* is virtually alone in a cabin secluded in the woods. He lounges in a bathrobe and grungy hair. He hides cigarettes in a desk drawer from the housekeeper. He struggles to complete his next book and eventually has a break with reality (Koepp). The aforementioned example may seem a bit extreme, but the “crazy writer” stereotype is not a new concept.

The association between madness and creativity has been hypothesized since ancient Greece. In the last century and a half the relationship between mental illness and creativity has been the subject of controversy. Research, opinions, writers’ works, and writers’ opinions provide conflicting information, making it hard to sort what is what. A review of information from the 20th and 21st centuries provides insight into the various arguments.

Writers have been noticeably eccentric for thousands of years. In “The Association of Creativity and Psychopathology: Its Cultural-Historical Origins,” George Becker explains, “The

relations between creativity and mental illness has been a subject of Western society from about the 1830s to the present” (45). Becker examines the controversy by examining historical and societal beliefs regarding writers. The ancient Greeks attributed the talent of poets and philosophers to “demonic possession and melancholia” (46). The writers in ancient Greece were not seen as insane but as messengers of the gods. In *The Price of Greatness*, Arnold Ludwig states:

Prophetic madness, induced by Apollo, enabled knowledge of the future. Ritual madness, precipitated by Dionysus, allowed emotional release and liberation from self. Erotic madness, inspired by Aphrodite or Eros, stimulated rapture and love. And poetic madness, inspired by the Muse, gave rise to lyric expression. Almost any extraordinary performance or creative achievement...came from one or another of these divine forms of madness. (1)

According to Becker, after the era of ancient Greece, little interest was placed on analyzing creative individuals until the Italian Renaissance. During this period, original creative thought was not highly valued. Emphasis was placed on the “imitation of the established masters of nature” (46). During the late Renaissance, a greater appreciation of original creation was embraced. Artists of the Renaissance period were described in terms of melancholia and madness. Like the ancient Greeks, melancholic temperament was assigned to gifted individuals.

As with most highly valued skills in societies, its value is dependent on the views of the majority or a powerful minority. Becker explains the term “genius” was introduced in the 18th century to describe people possessing a high degree of creativity. During this time, creativity was valued when paired with good judgment and sensibility. According to Becker, the concept of genius changed during the Romantic Movement during the late 18th century and early 19th

century. Genius was a label assigned to men of intelligence, men of ideas. Early in the Romantic Movement men of ideas lacked an identity. Madness was chosen as the distinguishing factor, although it is difficult to establish who made the determination. Becker states, “the idea of mania conveyed to the romantics the notions of possession, suffering, and weltenschmerz [literally world pain], and the display of these qualities confirmed an individual’s identity as a true genius” (48). Interestingly enough, as genius was gaining popularity, insanity was finding its place in the English vocabulary.

Vocabulary empowers people, but it is also a source of oppression. According to the American Psychiatry Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), the first category for mental illness was “idiocy/insanity” and was used to collect statistical information from the 1840 census. By 1880, there were seven categories of mental illness (xxv). Today, there are 15 categories of mental illnesses with many specific diagnoses. Most researchers focus on Mood Disorders when evaluating the association between mental illness and creativity. Some researchers have included Schizophrenia in their research, although most research indicates a higher rate of mood disorders among writers.

According to the *DSM-IV*, Mood Disorders consist of Depressive Disorders and Bipolar Disorders. Much of the research regarding writers and mental illness indicates writers experience depressive episodes and manic episodes, which is also characteristic of Bipolar Disorders. Features of a depressive episode include depressed mood, decreased interest in activities, insomnia, loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, decreased concentration, and recurrent thoughts of death. Manic episodes are characterized by excessive self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, unusually talkative, racing thoughts, distractibility, increase in goal-directed activity, and excessive involvement in enjoyable activities. It is important to note that

people can experience these symptoms without being considered as having a depressive or manic episode. According to the American Psychiatry Association the change in mood must be “sufficiently severe to cause marked impairment in occupational functioning or in usual social activities or relationships with others...” (356, 362). When evaluating the presence of mental illness in writers, the severity of symptoms must be considered. The possibility exists that writers share similar thinking styles with people who experience mood disorders, as opposed to the writers actually having a mental illness.

However, evidence does support the claim that writers have more mental illnesses than the general population. In “Why Doesn’t the Writing Cure Help Poets?” James Kaufman and Janel Sexton report 10% of the American population has a depressive disorder and 1.2% has a bipolar disorder. Nancy Andreasen conducted a study examining the rates of mental illness among creative writers and a matched control group. In “Creativity and Mental Illness: Prevalence Rates in Writers and Their First-Degree Relatives,” Andreasen reveals 80% of creative writers “had an episode of affective illness at some point in their lives, compared with 30% of the control group” (1289). A significant percentage had a type of bipolar (43% compared to 10%). Additionally, writers suffered a higher rate of alcoholism (30% compared to 7%). In “Mental Illness and Creative Activity in Female Writers,” Arnold Ludwig conducted his own study examining mental health and writers. He found writers were more likely to suffer from depression, bipolar disorder, drug abuse, panic attacks, generalized anxiety, and eating disorders. In *The Van Gogh Blues*, Maisel argues that 100% of writers will experience episodes of depression. He rationalizes, “every creative person came out of the womb ready to interrogate life and determine for herself what life would mean, could mean, and should mean” (4). Researchers and authors may be labeling manic and depressive episodes as mental illness, when it is actually not

clinically categorized as such. Researchers analyzing the association between mental illness and creativity may be placing labels on creative people as a result of the unique ways they explore and interpret the world.

Writers often express themselves in ways that make others question their mental health. Marshall Duke and Katherine Thomas analyzed the cognitive distortions of writers in “Depressed Writing: Cognitive Distortions in the Works of Depressed and Nondepressed Poets and Writers.” They evaluated seven cognitive distortions identified as: (1) forming conclusions without supporting evidence; (2) overemphasizing select details while ignoring other facts; (3) overgeneralization; (4) distorting and exaggerating ordinary events; (5) trivializing consequential events; (6) assigning personal responsibility for events which one has no control; and (7) describing things in all-or-nothing terms. Thomas and Duke found depressed authors had more cognitive distortions than the control group. However, the control poet group had more cognitive distortions than the depressed authors (206, 208). Cognitive distortions are how writers resolve internal issues. Distortions in writing do not reflect a clinical mental illness, as much as it represents the current state of mind of writers as they work through the difficulties of life.

It is impossible to know exactly how mental illness and creativity are specifically linked. Current research provides little hope of ever knowing with absolute certainty if mental illness causes creativity or if creativity causes mental illness. However, there is a clear link between creativity and mental illness, more specifically the symptoms of manic and depressive episodes. Maisel states, “Nature-versus-nurture questions are unanswerable, except in superficial ways. What is clear is that some people grow up doubting and questioning while the majority don’t” (4). Writing is a safe and organized way to question and analyze everything. The entire science

fiction genre is the result of authors exploring the possibilities of worlds unknown to the present population.

Writers view the world differently than less creative people. Some researchers and authors argue the “crazy writer” stereotype is a self-fulfilling prophecy. People have criticized writers for living up to the stereotype, so they can create a unique identity. Who wouldn’t want to be known as the off-kilter artist:

Margaret Atwood, in *Cat’s Eye*, aptly has an artist say, “If I cut off my ear, would the market value (of my paintings) go up? Better still, stick my head in the oven, blow my brains out. What rich art collectors like to buy, among other things, is a little vicarious craziness.” (qtd. in Ludwig)

However, writers have an innate, unique way of viewing life. They process information and see the world differently than less creative people. Maisel argues creative people struggle to find meaning in everything. He states, “In the act of creation, [creators] lay a veneer of meaning over meaningless and sometimes produce work that helps others maintain meaning” (5). The struggle to find meaning in everything can lead to frustration when meaning is not revealed.

Writers analyze everything. Sometimes writers get hung up in their analysis. In “Why We Sing the Blues: The Relation Between Self-Reflective Ruminantion, Mood, and Creativity,” Joorman, Khan, and Verhaeghen discuss how writers focus on one thought, referred to as ruminantion and examine the possible benefit. “Deficits in the ability to screen out goal-irrelevant or previously irrelevant information may, on the one hand, lead to ruminantion but may, on the other hand, also contribute to original thinking” (227). Writers are often the people talking about the same topic for long after the conversation has passed. They maul the information until it is shredded piece by piece, at which point, the author creates something completely ingenious.

Writers' thought process is different than the average person. In an interview with Natalie Timoshin, Dr. Richard Kogan discussed the association between creativity and psychopathology. Kogan stated, "Creative people tend to see the world in novel and conventional ways, and they often seek out intense and destabilizing experiences" (Timoshin), which is often characteristic of a manic episode. Unique experiences help writers generate new ideas. Many people make decisions based on logic. They analyze pros and cons. Writers evaluate choices based on what will provide the greatest experience.

Creative people turn the ordinary into original, abstract thoughts. Jonah Lehrer, author of *Imagine* talks about creativity in an interview on "All Things Considered" with National Public Radio (NPR) host, Robert Sigel. Lehrer, explains:

The brain is just an endless knot of connections, and a creative thought is simply two cells, a network that's connecting itself in a new way. Sometimes, that's triggered by a misreading of an old novel. Sometimes, it's triggered by a random thought walking down the street - or bumping into someone in the bathroom of the studio. (National Public Radio)

Creative thinkers develop their ideas from the random places. A small event can lead to a brilliant idea, which later turns into a masterpiece.

Writers have imaginations that non-artistic people cannot fathom. Freud questions what sources creative writers use to create stories and how they "manage to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions" (143). Freud acknowledged that writers try to make their craft seem less foreign to laymen. "Creative writers themselves like to lessen the distance between their kind and common run of humanity" (143). Like most of Freud's work he looks to

the early development of writers. As children, humans fantasize and play. Through development, play lessens and adults become ashamed of fantasy. Freud views fantasies as unfulfilled wishes. Writers play out their fantasies through their stories. Freud refers to creative writers as the “dreamer in broad daylight” (149). In a story anything is possible. Logic, societal norms, even personal beliefs can be challenged in writing. Writing is the ultimate freedom.

Creative people experience a different reality than others. Their world is in their minds. Internal conflict arises when the outside world does not live up to the reality in the creative mind. A downward spiral often occurs, with feelings of worthlessness and isolation. In *Death Becomes Them*, Alix Strauss describes Diane Arbus’ (an American photographer and writer) “funk” after deciding she hated her photos of developmentally delayed children, which she previously was enthusiastic. Strauss states that Arbus “felt unfulfilled, misunderstood, and depressed” (190). Creative people often struggle with identifying with others, because their thoughts are so unique.

Writers seclude themselves, because they feel different than others. They also need time to gather and record their thoughts. Maisel recognizes that the need for seclusion can be a result of selfishness. He states, “The greatest obstacle to intimacy is our unhealthy narcissism: our egotism, our self-absorption, our selfish ways” (165). Additionally, the constant analysis of the meaning of situations in life leaves writers questioning if intimacy can be anything more than a superficial necessity. Maisel explains:

Creators often conclude that they are not fit for intimacy, that the people they meet are not fit to be their intimates, and that the very idea of relating is suspect. They declare that human frailties and shortcomings put the lie to love and intimacy. Internally they deconstruct “romance,” “love,” “intimacy,” “marriage,” “family,” and the rest of the vocabulary of relating and find only stale metaphors, hopeless romanticism, and wishful

thinking. Experience tells them that intimacy is just another myth. (170)

A combination of narcissism and feelings of disconnection leave writers creating stories of relationships rather than living them.

Exploring realms of humanity that others do not understand or view as taboo is a part of the creative process. Diane Arbus took photographs of individuals who were often outcast from American society. Strauss describes Arbus' work, "These subjects were hard to look at, harder still to shy away from" (189). Creative people interpret meaning through the exploration of taboo subjects. In *The Van Gogh Blues*, Eric Maisel states, "Creating is one of the ways [creators] endeavor to maintain meaning" (5). Writers venture into worlds feared by others. They explore the unknown to answer questions only their unique minds could imagine.

Writers uncover the darkest parts of humanity. In *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, Janet Malcolm quotes a letter Sylvia Plath wrote to her mother Aurelia Plath in October 1962. Plath expresses her frustration with her mother being frightened by her writings. Plath writes:

Now stop trying to get me to write about "decent courageous people" – read the *Ladies' Home Journal* for those! It's too bad my poems frighten you – but you've always been afraid of reading or seeing the world's hardest things – like Hiroshima, the Inquisition or Belsen. (16)

Writers' seek to explore and uncover life's hardest questions, while others try to ignore the unpleasant and find comfort in enjoyable things.

Writers break boundaries and make audiences face uncomfortable issues. Mark Twain provokes readers' emotions with his book, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by using the word, "nigger" over 200 times (CBS News). Twain raises awareness of the issue of slavery through his

story. In March 2011, CBS News produced a story regarding the controversy of replacing the word “nigger” with “slave.” Twain’s story continues to evoke emotion in audience’s today and shows the racial issues that exist in the 21st century.

Writers explore areas of humanity that others choose not to or are not able to venture but are willing to discover vicariously. Audiences are captivated by works with loveable antiheroes, wild adventures, and forbidden romances. The top grossing movies of all time include at least one of these elements. KITV News in Honolulu, Hawaii, put together a list of the 15 highest grossing films. Among them were three *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, which feature Jack Sparrow – beloved antihero. Three of the adventure-filled *Harry Potter* films made the list. Other adventure films included *Transformers: Dark Side of the Moon*, *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, *Toy Story 3*, and Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland*. Forbidden romance brings in big bucks at the box office as evidenced by *Titanic*, the second largest grossing film in history. Audiences love to break norms vicariously. They live to root for the bad guy, watch an impossible adventure, and sneak a peak at prohibited romances.

Creativity is a blessing and a curse. Maisel explains the creative person’s “gift or curse was that she was born ready to stubbornly doubt received wisdom and disbelieve that anyone but she was entitled to provide answers to her own meaning questions” (4). The changes in mood often associated with creativity can produce original works of art. However, the emotions attached to the highs and lows can create internal suffering in the writers.

Mild manic and depressive episodes help writers generate ideas and produce work. In episodes of increased self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, and racing thoughts writers have plenty of time to think of tons of original and creative ideas. In *Touched with Fire: Manic-depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*, Kay Redfield Jamison explains:

Hypomania and mania often generate ideas and associations, propel contact with life and other people, induce frenzied energies and enthusiasms, and cast an ecstatic, rather cosmic hue over life. (118)

Richards posits, “Depression’s facilitative role in the creative process is because of increased introspection” (qtd. in Joorman, Khan, and Verhaegen). Writers are able to process and capture their thoughts during lows in mood. Jamison elaborates, “Melancholy...tends to force a slower pace, cools the ardor, and puts into perspective the thoughts, observations, and feelings generated during more enthusiastic moments” (118). Writers must learn to ride the waves of highs and lows to produce work and maintain a sense of sanity. Debilitating depression often results in writers who are unable to balance the shifts in mood.

Life is about give and take. Even the most privileged people must sacrifice something.

Ludwig tells a story by Sophocles to demonstrate the concept:

A snake bit Philoctetes after he came into possession of a miraculous bow that never missed its target. Because of the stench and ugliness of his wound, his fellow warriors banished him to Lemnos. Now, an outcast, he silently endured his anguish alone. (126)

Mental idiosyncrasies are the burden writers must bear. The ability to bring the impossible to reality comes at a cost. In *Or Not to Be: A Collection of Suicide Notes*, Mark Etkind explains, “The cruel irony is that the same disease that may lead to greatness also keeps them from enjoying the fruits of their success” (35). Writers face a double-edged sword. Distortion of thought can lead to creative works, but enjoying life can be difficult.

Creative artists can become overwhelmed with the ups and downs they experience. Sylvia Plath, who suffered from Bipolar Disorder, stated, “When you are insane, you are busy being insane – all the time...When I was crazy, that’s all I was” (qtd. in Flaherty). Prolonged

and/or intense periods of mania or depression can become too much to bear. Strauss reveals at the age of 30, Sylvia Plath committed suicide by affixation from carbon monoxide. Her poem “Edge,” written six days before her death is said to be her version of a suicide note. It begins: “The woman is perfected/ Her dead / Body wears the smile of accomplishment” (Connell). Writers, like most artists, strive for perfection and accomplishment. In periods of depression, where feelings of worthlessness often prevail, it can be hard to see what greatness has already been accomplished.

On the other hand, mood instability may be a biological benefit to writers. In *The Price of Greatness*, Ludwig uses Ruth Richard’s biological models to explain how mental illness and creativity are intertwined. The acquired immunity model holds that exposure to disease builds immunity. Ludwig rationalizes that experience with troubles in life at a young age builds resistance to stress later in life. According to the compensatory model, presence of one disease can create immunity to another. Ludwig explains that the benefits of mild forms of mania (increased productivity, flight of thoughts, playfulness) give writers the “mental edge of chaos” (127), thus provide an advantage over others in creativity and output. The final model, outmoded genetic blueprint model, is evolution at its best. Adaption to changing environments leads to success. Ludwig speculates mental illness can contribute to original ideas and works, and could therefore have an evolutionary advantage (127). There is no clear reason why or how creativity and mental anomalies are linked.

Changes in mood can be positive. Artist, Jane Woodward explains, “I cannot imagine being a creative soul without a cycle of good healthy depression” (qtd. in Maisel 7). Andreasen and Canter posit, “individuals with bipolar temperament and heightened creativity may be ‘healthier’ than the average person” (Hofmann, Holm-Hadulla, and Roussel 44). Experiencing

ups and downs in mood is common for all humans. Mood swings provide time for rapid production of ideas followed by deep analysis. What is unique to writers is they take the events they experience and use them as a catalyst for storytelling.

Writers may attempt to produce mood shifts to obtain altered thoughts and moods. Caffeine, alcohol, and hallucinogens can alter mood and reduce inhibition, which can open the mind to a plethora of ideas. However, substances can be extremely addictive. Ludwig identified people with careers in the arts as having a higher rate of drug and alcohol disorders compared to those in other professions. Nonfiction writers and poets were particularly prone to alcohol disorders, as well as drug disorders developing before the age of 40 (151). Additionally, life experiences can produce shifts in moods. Negative moods can evoke depressive states. For some writers, depressive states provide inspiration. In “Depression and Creativity – The Case of the German Poet, Scientist and Statesman J. W. v. Goethe,” Hofmann, Holm-Hudulla, and Roussel question if Goethe let himself slip into crises to encourage periods of poetic creativity (46). Setting one’s self up for challenging events, can certainly provide stories to tell when inspiration is scarce. The emotions evoked by crises provide writers with a drawing board of situations and reactions for characters.

Writers must learn to balance the fine line between creativity and mental illness to remain healthy. Hofmann, Holm-Hudulla, and Roussel examine the extreme mood swings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as they relate to his work. Goethe was a successful poet, who experienced severe mood swings beginning at the age of 14. In periods of depression, Goethe’s poetic inspiration increased. During times of well-being, he lacked poetic inspiration, but had more successful “scientific and social activities and achievements” (43). Hofmann, Holm-Hudulla, and Roussel explain, “Eventually, Goethe found an ideal equilibrium between these poles of the

human search for individual creativity and social cosmopolitanism” (48). Writers have a difficult time working in creative and logical states at the same time. Creative times are associated with abstract thinking, in which the writer is open to any and all possibilities. One might think abstract thinking and open mindedness create the perfect mixture for scientific discovery. However, during the creative state, the mind often pushes out reason and logic in favor of the seemingly impossible. The writer spends time imagining and writing, instead of finding solutions. Much like Goethe, creative people must find a balance between individual creative exploration and social responsibility.

Balance is important in all areas of life. Writers must learn to balance selfishness with selflessness. Additionally, mental health practitioners must balance the needs of the creative artist with the needs of society. When analyzing mental health and mental illness in writers, practitioners must recognize the difference between “healthy mental illness” – which research refers to as mild states of depression and mania – and mental illness, which affects the social functioning of the individual. Mild states of mania and depression do not interfere with daily functioning. On the other hand, severe states of depression and mania should not be minimized to episodes of artistic temperament. While artists sway on a tightrope between creative expression and exploration and mental idiosyncrasies, mental illness should be taken seriously.

Mental health disorders are real health problems. Writers cannot make themselves ill, just to meet a stereotype, at least not to the extent of deterioration seen in those suffering from mental illnesses. As evidenced by the self-inflicted deaths of Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway, mental disorders led to premature deaths. Kaufman found that writers have a shorter life span than other professions. He states, “Writers die young” (Duke and Thomas 205). Idealistically, psychological treatment can help writers live more fulfilling lives with treatment.

Treatment should be approached holistically. Some people, especially artists, are hesitant to seek treatment. Artist, Edward Munch expressed his belief that artists must suffer. He explains that taking away his suffering would “destroy [his] art” (Joorman, Khan, and Verhaegen 231). If mental instability is the sacrifice paid by the creative, the fear of losing the creative touch is realistic. Additionally, overmedication can reduce or eliminate creative thought. The severity of mood swings should be considered. Mild shifts in mood can be productive, whereas extreme depression and mania can result in premature death.

The innate desire to explore the world and find meaning in what others find meaningless can provide excitement, joy, and wanderlust. The criticisms from others who say writers are eccentric, lazy, or attempting to live in a fantasy can be hurtful. The self-criticism of the value of a piece of work, the worth of self, the struggle to produce a masterpiece can be too much to bear. The human desire to connect with others can seem unattainable when it feels like society casts out those with different ideas. Writers notice the small details in life, so they are able to craft stories that infect audiences. They read situations and people like books, so they can write the same stories flashing across the screen of life, all the while trying to put meaning to it all. The frustration that comes from finding meaning in a senseless world is like a small child searching for older children in a game of hide-and-seek. The snickers from vacant spaces taunt. The surprise and excitement upon finding another player mirrors the wonder for the writer putting the pieces together. The constant up and down of success and perceived failure is a reality for the artist. No one can ever judge an artist harder than she does. The pains of the creative life are the sacrifices paid to experience the world unlike anyone else. Writers must balance the ups and downs of life like a surfer on an epic wave.

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