

WHY DO I WRITE?

By Rob Harle

This short article is not intended as a scholarly essay but rather a monologue which I share with you.

Why Do I Write is a deceptively simple question, however, the more I try to explore it the more complex the answer becomes. Firstly, the question Why Do I Write is not at all the same as Why Do I Read. The two of course are related, there would be very few, if any writers, that are not regular readers. Many millions of individuals read books, articles, poems and so on without ever writing anything more than a letter or shopping list.

To state what is probably obvious the writing referred to in the context of this article is not business reports, technical specification manuals, newspaper articles and the like but creative writing, generally referred to as literature.

I write literary pieces from an inexplicable *inner compulsion* to do so. I have written, and had published regularly, almost all these works for over half a century. I am apparently one of these “troublesome” individuals who does not fit neatly into the Bell Curve – that is - 66% of the population. This was quite evident in my last years of high school which for want of a more eloquent term – I blew! A couple of months after leaving that place I wrote my first short story which found immediate publication. Strange that my English teachers told me I was basically hopeless in this area, and that my comprehension was appalling.

I am now a professional book reviewer among other things , especially for Leonardo Reviews and Journal, with well over two hundred reviews completed and published. These are of a scholarly nature and involve some of the most complex, hard to comprehend subjects possible, such as; molecular aesthetics, neurophysiology, philosophy, art and technology, and architecture. This work obviously requires a highly developed level of comprehension. A complete listing of these reviews and all publications is available on my website portfolio <http://www.robharle.com>

I reached a “fork in the road” at about twenty eight years of age and had to decide between concentrating on sculpture or writing. I decided on sculpture, even so I continued to write, particularly short stories and poetry. You see it just will not go away! Seems we cannot escape our destiny, my physical health no longer allowed me to carve stone and timber, so I completed an Honours Arts Degree, the culmination of this, other than a huge amount of essay, and creative writing was a thesis which explored the relationship of Freud’s concept of the subconscious with the characteristics of Surrealist poetry. This unpublished thesis is available for download from <http://www.robharle.com/pages/essays.html>

Through all of these various activities I have been involved in, since leaving school, writing has remained, sometimes centre stage sometimes back stage, but always the dominant mistress – sometimes a bitch in black leather, other times an angel in flowing white silk. Serious writing is hard work, as the saying goes – 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration - but without the 1% the resultant writing is very ordinary to say the least.

As mentioned I write from an inner compulsion, this sounds like an “affective disorder”. I do not write to win competitions, get literary prizes nor to try and secure a spot in the literary glitterati club. I cannot say if my writing is good, bad or indifferent, that is for others to assess, but what I can say is, it is “existentially authentic”. That is, it is honest. It is not created with an eye on the outcome, it is written, as its written, as its written. Poetry and other creative literature is just like painting, the work tells the creator what to do next. The creator is more like a facilitator of a mysterious process which in the very best works, sees the writer’s preconceived conscious ideas abandoned which then allows something new, original and vital to evolve. If I lived on a deserted island with no hope of rescue I would still write because I have to. Critics say if a person writes they are doing so with the hope and intention of being read. This is a secondary, and “after the event” consideration for most serious writers. What happens with the manuscript after it is finished should have no influence on the process and procedure of writing.

I never go to writer's conferences, enter competitions nor deal with organisations whose main concern is with literary one-upmanship, than the real quality of the writing. I wrote a short children's story early on, sent it in to the Australian Women's Weekly and it was accepted and published in the next issue. The remarkable thing about this is the magazine received generally over three thousand submissions a month for consideration. A "literati" acquaintance told me being published in this popular magazine meant nothing, only being published in a quality literary journal had merit. The circulation of the AWW was around 800,000! The circulation of Australian Literary Journals was probably a hundred or so!

As mentioned at the start of this article the question is rather deceptive. I am at a loss to explain why I ever became interested in writing, it is indeed mysterious for a number of reasons. No one in my immediate contemporary family were writers; there were no books in my home when growing up (except one small dictionary); the school "thing" could not have been more antithetical to becoming a writer even if it were planned? If I had to make a guess I would say I was born with writing as my destiny and regardless of circumstances I would fulfil that destiny. I simply had to wait until I got school off the compulsory agenda for it to break free from that conformist prison. I have since found out my great grandmother was a poet, and artist – ah ha! poetic DNA. This discovery lead to me creating and editing my recent book *Voices Across Generations: Poetry Past & Present*. Authorspress, India. 2014

After leaving school I then started reading as well as writing. Many books/writers have influenced my thinking and development as a writer Kafka, Shakespeare, Virginia Wolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre, Baudelaire, Tennyson, Eliot and Shelley to name the most exciting. However, the most amazing book I have ever read is still *The Fountain Head* by Ayn Rand. The poetry and song lyrics of Leonard Cohen have been a continual inspiration since the late 60s.

I dared not mention to friends and co-workers (in the trades) that I wrote poetry as well as the stories. Sydney, Australia in the late 60s was not exactly the cultural / literary capital of the universe. This anti-cultural milieu, where sport reigned supreme, and sportsmen were society's heroes – and poetry was for poofers, bludgers and, "why don't you get a real job"

has left indelible scars. Below a short poem which came from this depressing state of affairs written almost fifty years ago.

A Poet's Place

*A poet's skin starts out too thin and supple
Of life and love he has so much to sample,
But all too soon the surface starts to harden
And gentle boys grow into granite men.*

*Rejection slips spill off the kitchen table
He sees them as the spoils of lonely battle
To pay the rent he pens commercial jingles
In shadows cast from burning midnight candles.*

In the numerous articles I have written for popular magazines I have tried to pass on practical information combined with a creative literary style. One of the main reasons I write these type of articles is to share information I have acquired through experience and also my formal training, that is, they are of an educational nature. Some of the best journalism has these characteristics of combing literature with pragmatic information transmission. This type of writing is quite different to basic journalistic

My favourite writing genre is poetry. I have two volumes of my own poetry, *Scratches and Deeper Wounds* (1996) and *Mechanisms of Desire* (2012), a third *Winds of Infinity* is on the way. The discipline required in writing poetry, of using the absolutely most appropriate word, in creating the scope of a “novel” in a mere twenty or thirty lines is a challenge which continually pushes my abilities. I also believe poetry has the power to change the world – I am interested in helping to change the world to a better more equitable place for all people regardless of race, religion, age, gender or social status. As Shelley, I believe rightly stated: “*Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.*”

I will finish this short epistle with one of my own favourite poems:

Sandstone To Ink

*Of sandstone dust my spirit formed
a love of stone and water in
the dreaming of the Hawkesbury rift;
I dared to shape this nature's art
to carve and grind and penetrate
and share the vision of our primal source
to fire the soul's of others.*

*Inspired by sculptors past
Noguchi, Michelangelo and Moore
driven by a sacred muse
whose face remains illusive,
This spirit of the stone in silence
demands an awful price.*

*To dance on high with spirits fierce
is fraught with danger's sword,
Though double is the razor's edge
when dancing with the naked ape
whose tongue is sharply forked
and heart is hardened with desire
for more and more and more.*

*Art circus schooled in sabotage
adorned with superficial smiles
you couldn't violate my dream
nor change one mallet's thrust,*

*But coupled with these fragile bones
disintegrating far too soon
a transmutation of the means
has traded chisel in for sharper pen.*

*Now once more the ink will flow
or is it boiling blood
to trace its tracks across a page
instead of through the sandstone dust.*

Bio:

Rob Harle is a writer, artist and academic reviewer. Writing work includes poetry, short fiction stories, academic essays and reviews of scholarly books and papers. His work is published in journals, anthologies, online reviews, books and he has two volumes of his own poetry published – *Scratches & Deeper Wounds* (1996) and *Mechanisms of Desire* (2012). Recent poetry has been published in *Rupkatha Journal* (Kolkata), *Nimbin Good Times* (Nimbin), *Beyond The Rainbow* (Nimbin), *Poetic Connections Anthology* (2013), *Indo-Australian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry* (2013) and *Rhyme With Reason Anthology* (2013), *Asian Signature* (2013), *Building Bridges Poetry Anthology* (2014). *Voices across The Ocean Poetry Anthology* 2014)

His art practice currently involves digital-computer art both for the web and print. His giclée images have been exhibited widely. He is especially interested in promoting the inclusion of visual art in academic and scientific journals.

Formal studies include Comparative Religion, Philosophy, Architecture, Literature and Psychotherapy, his thesis concerned Freud's notion of the subconscious and its relationship with Surrealist poetry.

Rob's main concern is to explore and document the radical changes technology is bringing about. He has coined the term techno Metamorphosis to describe this.

He is currently a member of the: Leonardo Review Panel: Manuscript Reviewer for Leonardo Journal; Manuscript Reviewer for the Journal of Virtual World Research; Advising Editor for the Journal of Trans-technology Research; Advisory Editor for Phenomenal Literature (India); Member Editorial Board, Episteme Journal (Bharat College).

Artwork, Publications, Reviews and selected writings are available from his website www.robharle.com harle@robharle.com