

A Crock of Sundries

Volume One

prose, poetry, and plays by
Timothy R. Baldwin



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*To the aspiring writer:
You will never truly master the craft of writing,
but your work tomorrow will always be better than
it was today.
Write on!*

I

A Lasting Heirloom

In Meme and Story

Creative Nonfiction:

An Essay on Writing

Look up writing quotes by Flannery O'Connor, and you'll find a plethora of ways in which she describes the writing process. Statements include everything from writing being a terrible experience to writing being some means by which the author discovers deep-seated truths.

Indeed, one could expeditiously launch a similar search on such writers as Ernest Hemmingway, Annie Dillard,

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or Langston Hughes. Perhaps upon a philosophical bent, one could even go so far as to decontextualize the quote, create a meme, and post said meme on their social media account, proclaiming, "A-ha! This is my truth as well!"

Yet, the perpetrator of the said meme will be guilty of pretext, lazily using someone else's words on the pretense of intellectual ingenuity instead of doing the hard work of creating their meaning.

As Shakespeare once said, "Brevity is the soul of wit!" So let my long words express my shorter meaning.

In writing, I have plumbed the depths of my beliefs in a cathartic attempt to exorcise mendacious wordplay and get to the very heart of truth. Most of these verbal meanderings have gone unpublished, left to simmer in solitude in anticipation of some promised excavation of the mind. Such long-forgotten literary musings lay in wake until, like Dr. Frankenstein, I haphazardly attempt to incorporate new ideas with the old while lacking the courage or the patience to start the work from the very beginning, as many great artists are wont to experience.

From Van Gogh to Fitzgerald, such great artists never in their lifetime experienced the fame and fortune amassed as a result of their great masterpieces. Van Gogh only sold one painting in his lifetime, and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* didn't take off until long after he was dead. Yet both masters poured themselves, heart and soul, into every jot and tittle of their masterpieces. Dare I compare myself to these masters as I painstakingly piece sentence after sentence in what I hope to be my most remarkable work yet?

To date, I have published four full-length works and a handful of short stories and poems in anthologies or quarterly magazines. All of these works represent a truth about myself and the way I see the world around me. They are a result of the courage, patience, and hope I've poured onto the pages through systematic planning and revision. Before I set out to take up the helm of another literary project, I dawdle as the idea develops. Somewhere in the back of my mind, the idea is waiting for its awakening as I engross myself in the sum-total of someone else's painstaking process.

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Now to why I write. Is it necessary for me to write? Probably not. Did Van Gogh have to cut off his ear? Did Fitzgerald have to carve a piece of himself into the pages of his masterpiece? Probably not. Yet, they both did what they did for love, as do I. I also pray that you, my dear reader, enjoy the end product as much as I enjoyed the process that got us to the point of literary convergence.

I started as most great artists do, learning from the greats. Growing up, my mother instilled within me a love for reading. She'd devour and share with me one book after another, taking equal pleasure in simply crafted stories and the far more meritorious works of C.S. Lewis or J. R. R. Tolkien.

However, my real reading journey evolved into writing when a colleague of mine published his first novel. After all, if he could do it, then why couldn't I do the same? My writing is and always has been representative of the encouragement of my friends, family, and teachers. They are people who make up a tapestry of dedicated support, from elementary school through college and post-graduate

work.

It's been a loving journey, a culmination of everything I have read, seen, and experienced in life. I borrowed a little bit of style from one author over here and incorporated a little bit of craft from an author over there, all of it mixed with a bit of flair of my own.

Indeed, during my life, I never once, and at no specific moment in time, did I ever realize that I enjoyed writing per se. I just did, do, and always will. It's a flow, a process, and a point to which I strive for perfection with no end in sight. Each piece may be distinct to my reader, but for me, each is a chapter in my story—each piece representing what I've learned along the way and poured into each subsequent literary work.

Starting another story can be a thing of great procrastination. Yet, I love being in the thick of the process - one that is as soothing as it is savage. As much as an author becomes attached to the ingenuity of his own words, an author must rip out those words when they fail to serve the narrative. Thus creating a sort of dichotomy for the

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author, existing as both master and slave to the story.

The story. These stories. At some point, they will exist apart from me, becoming a permanent record of who I was and how I saw the world at the time of writing. Perhaps that is why I write. Or maybe I'm hoping some reader will find great profundity in my words and see fit to quote me in a decontextualized meme with a nonsensical background like pink balloons or a vector illustration of a man skiing. Or, even better, photoshop one of many publicly available photos of myself while attributing to me some unsound advice about writing that I would only say long after I'm dead. Regardless, even without observation, I will always write on.

I, Lamppost

A Poem

I feel like a lamppost.
Mounted on a shady street corner,
I stand tall and upright,
a radiant light,
in a pitch-black night.

Some take notice of me.
As the night engulfs the day,
my light is sought and found,
by those with the eyes to see
and appreciate my illumination.
Though sometimes it's blinding,
causing discomfort,

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leaving those wanderers blinking,
until with adjusted eyes peering,
they see with my radiance
through the darkness.

Other times my light is pale,
a soft comfort
to those wandering night souls
in search of some sense
in an otherwise dark world.

I am a lamppost,
spotted with rust and chipped paint,
covered by yellowed, tattered flyers -
pictures of lost pets,
posters of garage sales,
and alluring announcements.
Though weathered by years
and holding onto memories,
my light does not wane,
but casts out night's fears.

I have seen so much,
I have been used
by so many.
Yet I am here,
giving light to any
who would draw near,
seeking solace and comfort
in the light

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which shines
amidst the dark hours
of life's expedition.

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My Not Favorite Teacher

A Poem

I looked up at him
With my best stern
look, sassy
look, a look
that told him I was serious.
Standing jaunty like
with arms
on hips, feet
wide apart, head
slightly cocked,
and wide eyes.

Tight lips
with a downward curve.
Just like my momma shows me
every time I get in trouble.

Which is often. I mean:
only sometimes, and
maybe never.
I'm a good girl. Really!
Even when my teacher calls
home and speaks to momma
through an interpreter.

I didn't do nothing. That's why
I stand there staring
scowling, and showing
my teacher. I mean:
I'm serious. He's my favorite,
but now he's not.
I'm in trouble with momma,
so he's in trouble with me.

So I stand and stare
like momma scowls
at me, just waiting
for him to say... something.
But you know what
he said:
"What's that look for?"
And my reply:

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a frown and an upward
tilt of my head
and a jut of my jaw.
But he says nothing,
so you know what I said?
I said:
"You should know."

And he
he just
just smiled
and said
Nothing.

Can you believe the nerve? But I just
walked, no
stomped in silence
away from him
my not favorite teacher.

About the Author



Tim grew up in Syracuse, New York. He currently resides in Maryland where he teaches English, Creative Writing, Film, and Theatre on the middle school level. At the insistence of his own students, he began writing seriously in 2014.

He credits his love for story to his mother, who spent countless hours reading to him and his siblings when they were growing up. Growing up, he devoured the literary words of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Piers Anthony, and many others. Mysteries, thrillers, and fantasies are among the genre he most frequently reads.

When he's not writing, he's reading, teaching, camping, or enjoying a live music concert.

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