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Writing fiction close to home

Abstract

How do you develop a narrator who does not feel autobiographical to the author? This is the very real concern of a self-conscious writer who reproduces his hometown on the page.

Two themes emerge in this paper: there is first the notion of reflection, of removing oneself physically from 'home', in order to turn around and see it in a new light, allowing for a more objective relationship between writer and setting. Out of this distancing develops the second theme, that of voice. I work to create a narrator with a distinct voice, specifically an idiolect that is not my own, to further allow myself to step out and away from that setting, and let it 'speak' for itself.

The development of this new narrator is not an affectation but a vehicle of enablement. By using someone else's voice, I can draw from my own observations and experiences without the vice-grip of self-implication. This essay describes the relationship between the author and the narrator, and the subsequent constraint of speaking with another's mouth.

When I've tried to base fiction stories in my hometown, I've never been comfortable with the result; it feels heavy with my own voice, filtered by my eyes, and the characters seem as though they are wearing masks that may at any time fall off to reveal that they are, in truth, just people in my life. This writing 'too close to home' is accompanied by both paranoia and embarrassment, even if the characters and events have nothing to do (or so I think) with the people and events around me. When looking over what I've written, there's always that thought: 'So-and-so will think I'm writing about them,' or 'I know someone who will take offence at this.'

Then there's the buildings, businesses, landmarks, locales, all of which provide readymade settings and interactions. But again, what if someone should recognize the park my characters meet in, or the janitor at the protagonist's high school? What if my brother finds himself in one of my short stories? These concerns may seem ridiculous, but they are very real when you find yourself preoccupied with altering your characters and places just to disguise them and remove any chance they might be recognized. With these preoccupations, it's almost impossible just to write a story that takes place anywhere near me, geographically or socially. But without experience, there is not much hope of producing a story that feels real.

A possible solution, for me, is to leave that place, to go somewhere else so that I can turn the focus back on that setting from the outside. If I'm not there, I can take a bird's eye view and see where the story lies. Seeing the land from the outside - from a distance - changes the perspective and actually changes the view. It changes the reality *into a different reality*, and changes the *I* standing in the middle to an *I* with room to move and create. The hope is that I can take the

small town that I grew up in, that specific place, and make it grow to become understood and recognized by readers as perhaps a little bit like that place they themselves had to leave in order to see.

The goal, then, is to flee physically from that land in order to turn my gaze around and see it for what it wants to be, as well as what I need it to be. By changing my perspective to one of allowance I can make that world real again as a fictional setting:

it is always on a line of flight that we create, not, indeed, because we imagine that we are dreaming but, on the contrary, because we trace out the real on it, we compose there a plane of consistence. To flee, but in fleeing to seek a weapon. (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 135-36)

With a weapon in hand, I can turn to deal with what I fled from in the first place. The challenge is to find a weapon that works, some aspect or form of writing that allows me to manipulate the 'abandoned' setting and open it up to be seen on the page as a story I've created, rather than a hidden autobiography. Fiction records experiences and ideas, re-shapes and re-creates the world that surrounds the writer, and projects it outward, in an attempt to share. To write is to share thoughts with others, to create a community.

For me, this is exactly where the problem lies; when writing about the world around me, I cannot separate the identity of self as community member from self as writer. Writing is a personal art, and it's difficult to write emotionally and personally when I'm constantly looking over my shoulder hoping that no-one recognizes me as the writer, or themselves as the characters. Hence the need to escape. This escape, this 'line of flight', is the adventure outside of a recognizable and perhaps predictable world; it is the branching off from the group, the solo journey into the unknown abyss.

Perhaps *one* of the weapons that I seek out is a type of writing that stands on its own. Instead of writing in a voice that I am accustomed to, and maintaining that connection between the setting of the story and the storyteller who lived there, I can develop a narrator whose history has nothing to do with mine, save that of living in the same neck of the woods. His story is not my story, and his voice is not my voice.

Since I am on a line of flight, and removed from home, I work to create this other person to take my place; through his eyes I see the world about which I write. This new voice is distinct; it is purposefully not mine. Taking the narrative out of my mouth and putting it into someone else's is for the benefit and enablement of my writing process; this is something I have to do in order to *see* that place, which must come well before the act of *showing* that place. The viewpoint is the negotiation between the 'I' of the writer, and the 'I' of the narrator/character. Without this negotiation, for my own writing at least, the creative product can never really get off the ground. There needs to be an agreement between the writer and the narrator, an understanding of how the world will be seen, and how it will be made available to the reader through the story.

It may be time to introduce the narrator that I have created, so that my predicament in the fiction I am working on can be better understood. His name is Joseph Gaines; he's an alcoholic forestry worker in his early thirties. His wife and son have left him and he lives alone with their possessions and his memories. Gaines' past has been filled with conflict. He is violent and selfish,

constantly struggling against his own station, always looking for an escape, a line of flight away from the life around him:

When I get home the sun is orange through the black trees and it makes the woodpile look like a tiger or somethin. Coloured chalk pictures all over the damn driveway from months ago. I was gonna pick up all that chalk for when Marie came home so the kid would still have it, I'd give him the box and say, 'Hey son go out and draw some nice pictures. Your mom and me wanna talk.' But I ended up steppin on most of it anyway. Like I said it's been months now.

I go in the kitchen and put my lunchbox and thermos on the counter. It's more dirty than I care to mention. Start pullin things out of the fridge cause I'm half starved but there ain't much to make any kind of decent meal with and the lettuce is lookin pretty bad. Outside, the trees are black and movin slow in the yellow air. Denson's fucking dog will not shut up and I always wonder doesn't a dog get a sore throat, ever? I almost go to rip off the screen door and run next door to bash that mutt's head in but Denson is a good man so I stand with one hand on the bad lettuce and the day tickin away out in the yard.

To create a narrator with an erratic thought-pattern, vocabulary, perhaps a lack of interest in 'book-learnin', and to use his voice to tell the story, gives the writer an opportunity for a distancing beyond geography. A good author can work within the constraint of an unconventional or unreliable narrator, an arrogant or racist or unreasonably violent narrator, and still write a story that readers may feel passionate about. The readers may find themselves not necessarily accepting, but being enthralled by, the narrator's viewpoint and affected, perhaps even missing, that voice after the last page.

Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is an obvious example of unreliable, unpredictable narration. The entire first section of the book is incredibly confusing as Benjy, the handicapped member of the Compson family, introduces us to a world in which there is no differentiation between 1898 and 1928. We also learn from his brothers: Quentin, who is so in love with his own sister that he commits suicide, and Jason, who is so full of hypocritical disdain for his family and absolute hatred for his sister and her daughter that he would commit parricide if given the chance. A further example is Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, perhaps the ultimate example of a disturbingly unreliable narrator, as we are forced to live out Patrick Bateman's horrific fantasies, described in visceral detail by a voice that is all the more troubling because it is so blasé. Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*, while narrated in third person, nonetheless follows a protagonist with an absolute vacancy of guilt, or respect for human life. We are presented with a line-up of narrators and protagonists who advocate a spectrum of senseless murder, rape, homicidal racism, sexism, incest, infanticide, and yet, as horrified as we may be, we will read the whole book, and we may mention it at supper and try to share it with friends.

Another controversial narrative, though not for vulgarity but for its handling of historical 'truth,' is Peter Carey's history of Ned Kelly. A model of fiction written from the viewpoint of an 'uneducated' narrator, yet carrying much power and persuasion, *True History of the Kelly Gang* retells the legend of historic Australian bushranger Ned Kelly in first person narrative.

I had read Kelly's own writing, the *Jerilderie Letter*, about the time I was really starting to read serious literature. The notion

of creating a sort of poetry from an uneducated voice, like Faulkner does in *As I Lay Dying*, was attractive to me then and still is now ... There were all sorts of problems with writing that book ... but there was never a problem with the actual voice. (Carey in O'Reilly 2002: 164)

Fortunately for Carey, he had a 7,391-word essay to work from. Ned Kelly's own words, whether penned by Joe Byrne or not, in his legendary address the 'Jerilderie Letter' (Kelly 1879) offer up to the researcher a wealth of material to reference in creating a voice and manner for the development of a character based on Kelly. Carey's challenge, then, was to absorb that voice, as constraining as it is, and to work from inside it to re-produce the entire history of Kelly, or the history most empathic to what a fictional daughter may have wanted to know about her outlaw father. What originally had been an eager and stunted narrative, negligent of punctuation or pause, becomes, through the medium of Carey's art, a musical and flowing saga in a voice that seems formulated for the occasion.

In my own case, I am tasked not only with creating the voice of Joseph Gaines, but with creating the character as well, conjuring forth a dynamic enough creature that the distinct narration will be an asset, rather than a detriment, to the illumination of that part of the world with which I am so familiar, and the coherent use of it as a setting. When I narrate through him, I am aiming to experience this hometown anew because my personal preoccupations with it have to be put aside so that I can change the lens and see it in a new light. The danger of spending my whole life there and then writing about it is that *I spent my whole life there*. I have to keep in mind that the visualization I have when I mention the Smokin' Spur restaurant, or the Cowichan Community Centre, which boasts the world's biggest hockey stick *and* puck (VancouverIsland.com), doesn't happen automatically for the reader; I need to give everything new life by describing it as if it's new to me as well, to visualise the location as a reader would see it, not only as I would see it. Familiarity dresses us with blinders. Stepping back and looking again at the environment allows me to re-create the details that I've forgotten to notice.

Even a presumed familiarity can alter our experience or create assumptions that may ruin the real thing when we lay eyes on it. In *The Art of Travel*, Alain de Botton writes about the difference between gazing at a travel brochure, and the reality of a subsequent trip to the advertised location:

It is easy for us to forget ourselves when we contemplate pictorial and verbal descriptions of places. At home, as my eyes had panned over photographs of Barbados, there were no reminders that those eyes were intimately tied to a body and mind that would travel with me wherever I went and that might, over time, assert their presence in ways that would threaten or even negate the purpose of what the eyes had come there to see. (de Botton 2000: 20)

As humans, we naturally assert ourselves on each environment we enter. A miraculous landscape that we've driven all day and trekked an hour to admire is diminished to insignificance when we return to the parking lot to find that we locked the keys in the car. I found that in order to 'see' the place where I wanted to put the story, and really experience it for what it's capable of becoming, I had to leave myself out of the picture. As de Botton writes, 'it seems we may best be able to inhabit a place when we are not faced with the additional challenge of having to be there' (de Botton 2000: 23).

So I pull myself out of that environment in an attempt to see it in its entirety. I am familiar with seeing it from the ground, but now I *multiply* my view:

The new vantage point lends order and logic to the landscape:
roads curve to avoid hills, rivers trace paths to lakes, pylons
lead from power stations to towns, streets that from earth
seemed laid out without thought emerge as well-planned grids.
The eye attempts to match what it can see with what the mind
knows should be there, like a reader trying to decipher a
familiar book in a new language. (de Botton 2000: 39)

Stepping back and looking from a distance allows for this re-visioning of the landscape: including the bird's eye view, the hobbyist poring over the scale model. But the viewpoint I am using is not from a cloudy domain - a mistake I might have made in order to gain supposed authority had I stayed in my town. Instead of booming an omniscient voice over the land, I can choose multiple points to write from: for example, to whisper as I slink through the tall grass in someone's backyard or crouch behind abandoned cars on the outskirts of town. The voice I seek is immediate, close, basic. I'm on the ground, very much absorbed in the landscape, and this vantage has its benefits over the bird's eye view:

The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airplane ... The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front. (Benjamin 1979: 50)

By flying out of the maze and looking down, I can discuss its size, its many pathways, and can offer a way out. But by having been in the maze, by knowing what it feels like to stand bewildered inside it, I can relay that to the reader as well. By removing myself, I can offer both the experience of being in the maze, and the revelation of seeing the maze in its entirety.

With more than one view, I can create a new sort of map. It is more than one-dimensional, because it includes the depth of valleys and the height of mountains, the narrow footpaths to the river that are not visible through the fir trees and the tool sheds which are never padlocked. It can be viewed from my desk and from the street in the narrative. Areas of the map can be inaccessible one day and wide open the next, depending on what is happening in the story. This map is alive, it is 'connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 12). The map is a rhizome that spreads out to contact and create links between all aspects of the creation and writing process, 'a replacement of "either/or" ... with "and ... and ... and ..."' (Wise & Breen 2004: 168), in this case merging places and people and ideas and images and voices.

I need to be able to address, progress and return to all aspects involved in this project; there must be a constant flux between my research, geography, memory, writing and imagining. I need to interact with the world the fiction comes from, and the world it speaks to. The story is not an isolated reflection of *any* society, it is a detail of *a* society, growing and changing each time it is read.

The concept of the rhizome is one of multiplicity and convergence:

A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes ... Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 6-7)

The parts that make up the whole of my fiction exist in relation to one another. I, here, the writer in my current territory, draw on myself when I was there, in my fiction's territory. Naturally, 'there are gaps between the past of experiencing and the present of writing, between the fact of the old matter and its new recall, between the impressions "I" was capable of then and those "I" can have now' (McLean 2004: 49). These several versions of me live in rooms, or plateaus (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), connected to the room of the character, influencing but at the same time being influenced by him. The view outside the windows is the 'reality' of my home environment as I remember it, and it is the setting of the narrative. It also includes the areas I have yet to take the story. They are there; I just cannot see them yet. There is a constant flux like a breeze between these rooms and the worlds outside. The plateaus are not separate from each other; 'each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 22) as they exist above, beside and with each other. My narrator's domains and my domains are connected by stairs and ladders and open doors. 'There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 23).

Nigel Krauth, in his essay 'The Domains of the Writing Process', illuminates the multiple steps and factors of writing as a series of interconnected domains. In his essay, the notion of the rhizome emerges, as the connectivity between the domains:

Deleuze and Guattari see their rhizome - or symbol of how the world's thinking works - as being defined by lines ... a sort of zapping, synaptic, unstoppable, interconnected, interlayered system of planes on a universal mental scale. (Krauth 2006: 192-93)

Krauth takes these planes and applies them to writing in order to create a series of domains 'upon which separately the writer works, but which combine in their influence to make product' (Krauth 2006: 193). There is a need for exploration in this area, for a balance between clear description of craft and artful negotiation of form, to step away from

the wrong-headed way writers have thought about their process, to how they have been asked to enunciate their process in science-model terms not sympathetic to their perspective, and overall, how description of the writing process has suffered from lack of deconstruction. (Krauth 2006: 193)

My attempt here, with the creation of a visual 'house' inhabited by Joseph Gaines and me, is to contribute to a more creative analysis of this process, in particular the development of the narrator's unique voice. I can stand at my 'end' of the house, which looks a lot like the place where I live in Australia, and

I can shout something down the hall; by the time my voice reaches my character's end of the house, which is on Vancouver Island and is cluttered with dirty work clothes and remnants of his family life, it has changed to sound like him. He'll step into his living room and it will emerge behind me, a room borrowed from my past. I'll rewrite a scene in his front yard and watch out the window as our environment changes shape.

The voice that develops is that current which connects the rooms with each other and with the worlds the house is part of; this voice is the enablement I need to distance myself enough from that setting in order to tell the story. But this voice is where the problem lies; once it's out into the open, I cannot control it. His voice is not my voice, it has limitations and I've left him alone with the reader. Exegetically I can explain my connection and my reasons, but in the actual story, it's the reader who enters into the text to find what it is saying (Barthes 1977); I cannot walk alongside my fiction with my notes, pointing out what changes have been made, what experiments I've undertaken and why the reader should be lenient. The narrative is constrained to that one rough voice.

Gaines tells *his* version of what's taking place around him. He is impatient and self-serving, and he leaves off mentioning details that do not jive with his opinions. He rails against his lot in life, and justifies the neglect and abandonment, and his escape from his family: 'Women spend their whole life tryin to get into things and men tryin to get out, is the way I see it.' However, what he discovers in the story is (in the words of Bogue, referring to Melville's flights) 'an escape across the horizon to a different world, a world that is antithetical to the human realm, yet filled with nonhuman life' (Bogue 2003: 153). When the world around him is overrun with the walking dead, he is forced to survive by his own means, and to address his behaviour and its results.

There is more than one possible reading of my novella, and it risks being cast as a genre piece. On multiple occasions I've discussed my project with others, both socially and academically. The inevitable question, once I mention that the actual product is a work of fiction, arises: 'What are you writing?' Easy question, sure; I've spent a year so far on the project and by all means should have a glassy-eyed speech prepared to ward off any further inquiries. However, when I mutter from behind my hand that I am working on what could be called a 'zombie' story, there is no longer any hope or chance of the conversation remaining uneventful.

It is interesting to witness the rate at which a placidly half-interested listener can turn into a wary eyebrow-twitching sceptic, or a dedicated interrogator. This is the danger of writing (especially in an academic context) anything that is remotely genre-oriented; there is an enormous opportunity to lose respectability across any field of writing outside of the genre in which the product could find itself. To label oneself or to have oneself labelled, especially prematurely, as a 'romance' or 'science fiction' or 'horror' writer, amongst many other categories, is potentially to commit serious-writer suicide.

In my own narrative, I am working to distance myself from genre convention in order to draw the focus away from the clutches of the 'zombie' story, and toward the human elements through which any reader can identify their own place in the world: love, or the loss of love; and life, or the loss of life. To work both inside and outside a genre that is so easily identifiable is a risky endeavour; there is a threat of alienation and dismissal from both sides. If a reader feels strung along by an over-playful writer, or feels he is having his time wasted by a writer who proposes to defy convention yet hasn't done his homework, then that reader is lost:

However a competent reader approaches a work of literature, his attitudes and expectations depend importantly upon the genre he sees it as exemplifying. A work that rebels against genre-conventions equally relies on the reader's recognition of the conventions being rejected. Aesthetically relevant features of a work may stand out only if its reader has a background awareness of the historical development of the genre, or of the style, that the work is transforming in its distinctive way and perhaps without direct allusion within the text itself. The work may demand to be seen against the foil of the whole tradition from which it stems, and which it modifies by its very existence. (Hepburn 1983: 496)

However, there is another reading available, which places the zombies as a metaphor for the depression my character Gaines may be suffering. In the novella, he is given a book, *Black Dogs* by Ian McEwan. One person who famously suffered the 'black dog' of depression throughout periods of his life was Winston Churchill; as an example, 'After he lost power in 1945, Churchill grew frustrated and bored, and would fly into thunderous bad moods. His family would describe him as having "black dog". To escape, he threw himself into writing ...' (Churchill Archives Centre 2003). Being too self-conscious to keep a diary or journal, I have always been unable to address my own problems or concerns through autobiographical writing. By creating characters and giving them difficult lives, or putting them in bad situations and then forcing them to cope, I can write about life and pain as an observer, rather than as a participant. Controlling characters, and the world around them, gives the writer a wide range of opportunity for catharsis. For that matter, deciding to invade one's hometown with zombies ... well, the possibilities are endless.

Writing fiction is an escape, a line of flight away from the pure physicality of the world and an attempt to iron out some of the creases of the mind; travel is an escape, a line of flight away from the potentially smothering existence we've built up around us. George Moore said, 'A man travels the world in search of what he needs and returns home to find it' (cited Loeb 2002). My escape in order to write about home has taken me to the far side of the planet, a very physical distance travelled; my novella is a return to home, the discovery of a setting which is quite real to me, in which I can imagine and create a story that (hopefully) comes to life on the page. Writing fiction as myself, however, is simply not escape enough. If Joseph Gaines can prove to be a useful narrator, then I have found what I'm looking for.

Gaines is trying to tell an incredible story, and he knows only what he has seen happening around him. He doesn't understand what's taking place, and his attempts to find out are confused by his inability to interact with people. He lacks articulation, and has to rely on memory to relate the story: as there are many occurrences of fight-or-flight adrenalized moments, the narrative description gets pared down to 'I did this', 'And then that happened', or 'I ran through the forest'. And if I am to stay true to this character-narrator, then even at the best (or worst) of times - those moments that carry high suspense of emotion - my words are filtered through his unpoetic voice, because that is what I've created.

There are mirrors (Soja 1996: 158) in this house that I share with Gaines. Some of them are funhouse mirrors, changing my vision of the rooms and hallways, of our negotiation. I can see the world around and behind me, but in front of me, where he is standing, it's warped, and to differing degrees every time I move my head. The representation is alive and constantly shifting, depending on how close or far I feel when I look into the world of the narrative. This is

where the negotiation between writer and narrator plays itself out, inside the house where we co-habit. If I am happy with our agreement, I loom tall in the mirror, controlling that world. If I am frustrated by having to stay with him when I'd rather explore and explain another part of the fiction-world, then I appear small and squat, unable to control.

As another example of our sometimes difficult negotiation, I might narrate the protagonist's flight as: *I exploded from the decrepit doorway and launched myself full across the dead lawn, keeping my eyes solely on the tree-line in front of me, even as I winced against the expected cold hands that could at any moment grip my back ...* Gaines listens to me talk, nods his head, and then repeats me in his voice: *I come out of that house and booked it for the trees. I didn't know what in hell was after me.* The flight here is apparent, in that I have chosen to explore writing in this other voice, a voice that now struggles for consistency as a language that must be understood in written text for the benefit of the reader. There is a fine balance between the two; the shoot must remain attached to the node, but still be able to explore confidently, seemingly mindless of its own potentially fragile connection back to the known.

Deleuze and Guattari speak of 'minor' and 'major' language (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), which are two treatments of the same language. The major language is that which is accepted as the official; it is the blueprint. The minor language develops out of any community's usage of the major, and is a 'real' part of it, regardless of acceptance as such:

Forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws. No one is supposed to be ignorant of grammaticality; those who are belong in special institutions. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 101)

The irony of this statement must not go unnoticed, particularly in this age of language bastardization through email or instant messaging. The minor language is not a break from the major language structure, but a changing and expanding of it through usage; minor language shoots off from the major because it reaches further and deeper into the world surrounding the establishment of major language. Major language is the newsstand; minor language is the entire community surrounding the street corner that the newsstand is on:

One must find the minor language, the dialect or rather idiolect, on the basis of which one can make one's own major language minor. That is the strength of authors termed 'minor', who are in fact the greatest, the only greats: having to conquer one's own language, in other words, to attain that sobriety in the use of a major language, in order to place it in a state of continuous variation (the opposite of regionalism). (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 105)

The language of my narrative is not regional; this is not the dialect of rural Vancouver Island; it must be able to reach and be understood far beyond that. It is instead an idiolect belonging to Joseph Gaines himself, and his story should be clear, or unclear, to any reader regardless of geography. I have left that place in order to turn around and see it more clearly, as a distinct part of the world that is the setting of my history and now, with this novella, as the setting that I can manipulate in order to tell a story. The story, however, needs to be approachable by readers in Australia, or anywhere, as much as it should be approachable by readers in Canada. I had to step out of that world in order to

write about it, but the writing is not directed back at that world; it is directed toward any reader who would be affected by love, hate, life or death. These themes are global, and do not require geographical orientation. Any town, any setting will provide a story, as long as struggle can exist there. I wanted to use this place because I know it, just as I wanted to make the story as real as it is unreal. As I mentioned before, the hope is to take the small town, the specific, the 'minor,' and offer it up to the world around it, the universal, the 'major' so that readers can recognize aspects of their own histories, and relate to the narrator despite his rough, unpolished words.

There are histories and dynamics between characters in my story, and there are occurrences that would benefit from further explanation. However, this first-person narrative is told by someone who has no interest in language or articulation. Where I might wish to have lengthy descriptions of setting, well-developed character profiles, helpful clues as to what's happening socially in the story, he wants to get on with it and tell the story mainly with himself in mind. He is preoccupied with his thoughts, which emerge to haunt him even while he struggles to stay alive.

In my novella, I attempt to write in a voice that, although it is not a patois of the Cowichan Valley, sounds as though it *could* come from that part of the world; at the same time, this voice should come through as seamlessly as possible. Once the text is written, is available to be read, I cannot offer explanation for the simple voice of the character. It's out of my hands. My only choice, since I've created this monster, is to bring myself closer to him, to try to see through his eyes and my eyes at the same time, and use his words in the best way I can, 'creating a sort of poetry from an uneducated voice' (O'Reilly 2002: 164).

The open room in the middle of our house is where I sit with Joseph Gaines. When he first came in he was a floating head, barely attached to hands. Of course, he needed a head to speak, and hands to hold the axe. He had a skeleton and a voice. In this room we talked and argued and I listened to him over and over as he brought himself closer to me, or I allowed myself to close in on him, and we continued to thicken our flesh and learned to hold our head up and look everyone in the eye, and start to forget which one of us is speaking. The world is where we are tested; this is where I find out if the new skin and voice are working.

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