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Editorial

Dennis Trudell
Denison University

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EDITORIAL

Most of the stories and poems were born of necessity, the ones who wrote them feeling compelled to come up with something to hand into class. There are other, perhaps more desirable approaches, but it can happen that what begins as an assignment somehow turns into something resembling a work of art. Many writers had to force themselves to make a beginning, having discovered that the celebrated brilliant flashes of inspiration apparently happened only to other people. But then as they worked on what was hardly even an idea at the start, shaping it into the stubborn and limited words, the writing began to be quite important to them. You cannot work really hard with anything unless it matters, and by now their creations mattered a good deal to these writers. They began to think that a reading by the professor, and a brief pencil-turn in his grade book weren't enough, weren't worthy of their efforts, that in some vague way things would never again be the same because of what they were doing. Some of them felt this way, and they hoped their manuscripts would be read to the class, and what would be written in the margins became more important to them than whatever grade the piece of writing would receive. Some of them still weren't satisfied, so they turned them in to be considered for publication. Then the few who had written the best poems and stories had to do the rewriting and face again the limitations of the same words. By this time the whole thing was way out of proportion; they were spending much more time and effort than they could afford on what, after all, only counted as one assignment.

All of the writing, then, represents some degree of sacrifice. All of it was done at the expense of doing something else, instead of going out on a date or going to a movie or drinking beer or watching television or sleeping or something. Why the sacrifices were made is not exactly clear, and would be difficult to verbalize if it were. It is what tells a person working late at night the excited lies about his work, how good it is and how it may change the very concept of writing. It is what causes him to lose all sense of perspective, to feel as William Faulkner when he said, "I like to think

of the world I created as being a kind of keystone in the universe; that, small as the keystone is, if it were taken away the universe itself would collapse."

The simplest and perhaps the only honest thing to say is that the ones who did the writing wanted to, whatever their individual reasons for wanting to might have been. That is the only way writing, or painting or anything in art gets done, because somebody wants to do it badly enough to sit down and do it. Professional writers are often criticized for being lazy, because they sit while they work and often will take years to produce a single book. They are not lazy, the good ones, and if they don't write as much as we think they should, it is because of what it sometimes costs them. We are right in speaking of an author's "work"—it is exactly that. And it is not something you do well once and then forget about. It is like getting up in the morning, doing the hard thing day after day, book after book.

Writing, being an art, is at its finest an effort to hold, to arrest life. Living is something that everybody participates in; anyone can stare, for example, at a scene which we call beautiful. However, it quickly fades, something replaces it and it is gone and we are left with blurred memories, nothing else. Beauty by definition is elusive. The writer, in trying to capture the scene into words, is claiming it as his. And if he writes well enough, if he works hard enough, he may feel a part ownership in what the rest of us could only marvel at. His hold on it is never complete, never very firm—for nobody writes that well, but nonetheless he can come close, and he leads the rest of us by the hand.

There is no end of things to be written about, and that is what this editorial really wants to say. No one who is awake can live for five minutes without discovering something worth holding for examination, worth capturing within the printed page. The stories and poems that follow deal with a number of different subjects: a little boy's innocence, a girl's discovery, a society's values. But there ought to be an even great variety here. Somebody ought to have written a play, or something humorous. Young men and women should be seeing things freshly, and they should be doing writing that sings of this. These people ought to be trying new things, and this means perhaps making fools of themselves. (Be a fool often, if that is what they will call it, or the chances are that you will be nothing.) They ought to be aware of their countless daily emotions, the stream of sensations reaching them, and they should feel a need

to in some way order and so master them. Writing is a way. A million books are waiting to be written, for the human experience has only begun to be understood, much less recorded. The editors of this magazine should be seeing more writing. We should have received so much good material that we would have been forced to make an issue twice this size.

Anyone writing about writing is in a sense wasting his time, for in the end the stories and poems still have to stand for themselves. It is never the ones who talk about a thing, for instance about a lack of originality, of freshness in a culture—it is not they who matter. For afterward it is learned that a few quiet ones were at work proving them wrong. Read, then, what some sensitive people have discovered and felt to be worth preserving.—D.T.

In this issue the editors of EXILE are proud to publish "The Other Side of Light" by William Bennett. This story has been awarded the semi-annual EXILE-Denison Bookstore Creative Writing Prize