

Creative Writing for Creative Readers by DM Denton

Like many writers in “purgatory” (to borrow an apt word from James Herriot of *All Creatures Great and Small* fame) while trying to get published, I’ve encountered the question of which genre my novel belongs to. One of the cardinal rules in submitting a manuscript to literary agents or publishers maintains that an author needs to have a clear idea of its potential readership. My experience so far seems to confirm that without conformance to the idea that a book will only be read for its genre, “the heaven” of being third party published requires extra prayers.

It’s hard enough to research and narrow down the vast lists of agents and their specialties with a work that is fairly easy to categorize; even then it’s a game of throwing one’s creative labors to chance in hopes of scoring an advocate. It’s nearly impossible when you didn’t think about which bookseller’s “aisle” it should be placed in until it was too late—and, to make matters worse, if even at that point you’re very glad you didn’t.

Why shouldn’t a novel (or short story or poem or painting or symphony) be marketed as a commodity? After all it eventually needs to be sold to be of any value, right? Certainly this is the choice that confronts artistic souls again and again, whether to treasure their vision and voice or surrender to what potential financial profit might see and say for them. “Write without pay until somebody offers to pay” Mark Twain advises. Often the rest of the quote is omitted: “If nobody offers to pay within three years, the candidate may look upon this circumstance with the most implicit confidence as the sign that sawing wood is what he was intended for!” Well, I haven’t quit my “wood sawing” job! But still I write and believe that in spite of any cynicism; freely doing something is the only way of getting it done for whatever the rewards may be.

I create (and live) best in a naive bubble which doesn’t think of formulas for success or how to classify the result or even whether anyone else cares what I’m doing. Yes! That’s nirvana for me. It sounds selfish and is selfish, as meditation or any sacred practice is—a quiet place amid the chatter so words can actually be my friends. I need unity between my desires and abilities, patience with my highs and lows, amazement for how large and small a story is; to know what I want to accomplish and through study and imagination finding the inspiration and perseverance to do so. The writing comes as so much in life does: turning out exactly or nothing like envisioned. It can’t be neatly wrapped as then and there or here and now, as something out of this world or too much in it, as romance or mystery or thriller, as uplifting or depressing, for this market or that. It might be for very few or very many; perhaps only the unknown should be the judge of that.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: “One must be an inventor to read well. There is then creative reading as well as creative writing.”

That is the gift that all the arts offer all of us: selfishness becomes sharing the inventors in ourselves, the unlimited possibilities of our intellects and imaginations and hearts and spirits, adventurousness that suspects there is much to discover if we go where we've never gone before. That is what I've realized as a reader and writer for whom there's much yet to experience beyond what I ever thought I wanted to.

Creative readers (including those who don't yet know they are)—do you ever think of what the categorizers are keeping from you?