

## **Now More Concentrated**

*Interior: a study, book-lined and with a window. A man is sitting at a desk. Outside, a streetlamp comes on. The man notices this, puts down the pen he has been holding above a blank piece of paper, turns on the desk lamp and addresses us...*

I have overheard some say I'm not any specific sort of person at all, that I'm a mean average of the most common blandnesses and have never written anything because I have no ideas that fall even one inch outside the corridor of banality.

I say to these people: try being me for just one day. You will see that blandness is not my problem. It is the infinity of possibilities that builds into a great bolus and stops me up. I am so crammed full of desirable options that, come evening, the aggregate force of potentials presses on the underside of my skull and I pass out. My dreams are my only release valve. They empty me out so that I can start each day over.

No, I am certainly not bland. My friends will tell you that I'm enthusiastic about everything. They would say that I'm perpetually caught between possibilities, not devoid of them. I am enchanted into paralysis by the possible. Yes, I have tastes like anyone else, it's just that my tastes happen to include everything. Take literature, for instance. I love all literature. In fact I love all writing. I love the classics and the popular stuff; I love the scribblings of the semi-literate and the gloss and puff of advertising. They are all the result of rearranging the same 26 letters, and how anyone can discriminate between them is beyond me.

I always knew I should be a writer, I just never understood how to choose to be this or that sort of writer, or how anyone could hitch themselves to a single genre or style, even for the duration of just one short story. I spent years interrogating my depths, trying to locate my true feelings. But I found that they are all true to me. I realised that, just as I can love, fear and envy the same person, I can admire equally the narrative and the performative, the abstract and the descriptive, the concrete and the ambiguous, the long and the short, the florid and the plain, the informative and the nonsensical, the fictional and the factual, the experimental and the classic, the authoritative and the anarchic, the archaic and the contemporary, the finely wrought

and the low-fi, the unusual and the homely, the puerile and the sophisticated, the comic and the sombre and – most dilemmal of all – the invented and the appropriated.

I call it openness. There are some, I know, who called it gullibility. And I admit, I can be convinced by any theory, opinion or rationale presented to me. I instantaneously and entirely absorb any persuasive effusion made in my vicinity. I can't help it. I empathise too much. Maybe I suffer from the opposite of autism, whatever that might be called. Although suffer is the wrong word, surely, if I am continually enchanted.

For it is as delightful a notion to me that the earth is hollow as that it is flat; that all is about sex or all is rooted in capital seem equally likely; and that art should be an expressive and singular imaginative act, and that it must present a strategy for negotiating the world as it already is, are both declarations I have stood behind. But I am the first to agree, this can look like indecision. I can often be discovered completely motionless with the ingredients of some situation laid before me – a pen and a sheet of paper, a cup and an array of teabags, a television and listings guide. I need to be bumped in one direction or another. 'Have a peppermint one,' Jeffrey would say to save me from a day of standing there, in front of the kettle. How he knows which tea he wants, never mind which tea I should have, is occult to me. The day he taught me to say 'Whatever you're having' was a happy one indeed.

I find other writers outlandish. I used to be as scared of them as I am of ghosts and aliens. The very instant a single word is laid down, the range of possibilities shrinks. And with each subsequent word the possibilities dwindle further, until the final piece of writing is so specific it sits in a tiny, rigid cubicle with a label that can never be peeled off. My first question to a writer will always be: how did you commit? But my second would be, considering the near-infinite decisions to be made throughout, how could you ever know what it was you were committing to?

It's going to be a very different matter now, of course. This new legislation heralds a countrywide tidy-up. Poesis has been getting out of hand, I can absolutely see that. They say that in recent years it has been conducted at rates and volumes that outstrip industry, that the world is stuffed full of literature, poetry, genre fiction, autofiction and worse, and that it's been impossible for any one person to have read everything

for over a decade now. They say our imagination is glutted, word combinations are exhausted and ideas have become thin from overuse. Come to think of it, I have on occasion been able to see right through an idea, it was that thin.

I sympathise with those who blame the breeders. The population has rutted itself into obscene proportions. But I do wonder if I would have contributed too if I hadn't found it impossible to commit to that special someone. Yes, I do tend to dine on mezzes, pintxos, thali, smorgasboards and sharing plates—how else could I order off a menu? And yes, my fleshy apron does hang down, so even if I were to alight on that special someone, they might not be able to get to the toolkit. But I'm speaking hypothetically. I agree that biology should not be bounded by law, that to overrule the natural urge to reproduce is a form of brutality; but on the other hand, science has already intervened to bring mortality rates right down, so you can hardly say that we are in a 'natural' state of affairs these days. As ever, I can see it both ways, but sadly I've never been in a position to have to make that decision for myself.

But this legislation seriously limits one's options—and that's no bad thing at all. 'Nothing new may be brought into existence through creative means.' You could argue that 'creative means' includes sex, that childbirth is the ultimate act of creation and is therefore included in the ban. But then conservation of mass can be invoked to get around that. If you believe the rutting, eating, shitting human to inhabit a network of resources, then food, ova, sperm and breast milk are simply rearrangements of molecules within it, and a baby too. But fictions wrought by imaginations are of a different order altogether. They do not belong to a closed system of resources. There is no discernible rearrangement of matter. It is, they insist, something made from nothing. Some may find this arguable, but the law has been interpreted, and so here we are.

*The man smiles faintly, picks up his pen and turns back to his blank sheet of paper.*

*FADE to black.*

*FADE up to same scene as before: a man at his desk.*

They could have called it 'literary recycling' I suppose. It reflects the process better perhaps. A lot of writers are finding the term 'uncreative writing' off-putting, and I

can see their point. This may be the first time I've been able to get writing myself, but that's not down to a previous lack of creativity. What has changed is that now there's only one decision to be made: whether your initial idea is a good one or not. Then you simply apply it to your material, like a mathematical function to a number, and out comes the uncreative writing. You see, my problem has always been the knowledge that a choice made between several equally desirable outcomes will lead to yet more options; but if I know that one decision doesn't lead to another to another to another, I stand a chance. And if the choice is binary—whether to do something or not to do something—then I can throw my cap into the ring, or not, as hesitantly as the next person.

And so it is with immense pride that I present to you...

*He lifts a notebook and shyly proffers it towards us.*

... my first piece of writing. Of uncreative writing, if you must. I should come clean though. It was *sort of* Jeffrey's idea. I was driving him mad, as ever, with my prevarications, and he suggested that if I want to learn to make decisions, I should copy how other people do it. And what better a source can there be, I thought, for a middle-aged male writer who wishes to learn how to make decisions than novels written by middle-aged men about middle-aged male writers making decisions? And so I have indeed copied out their passages. It reads rather well, I believe. If I may...?

*He turns back a few pages and starts reading.*

He should begin, as he had decided earlier, with a simple account of what he had seen at the fountain. Thirst alone had decided it. 'I sipped my drink and decided to wait for him to come back,' he said. But he had already decided not to tell the story, suspecting that the explanation was simple and that it would be better not to expose his ignorance.

Long ago, at the age of ten, he decided that lipstick made him seem clownish. That notion was due for revision. He raced his tongue across his upper lip; he was trying to decide if he liked his mustache. He decided he

liked it; or, at least, he liked it for now. At that point—when his index finger came away slimed—he immediately wiped his hand on his jeans and decided to head downstairs and lock himself in the office for the duration of the night. He decided that if he wasn't going to escape or burn the house down, he ought go on back to his room. An anti-climax, but things could be worse. He could take a couple of pills and then write until he got drowsy. Then he could go to sleep.

In order not to alarm her, he tried to sound more reasonable than he really felt. 'Look, I've decided to stay on. There's some business I need to see to.' He became aware of the nervy, fidgeting music behind him the moment it ceased, and in the sudden new measure of silence, which seemed to confer freedom, he decided he must eat breakfast. He decided against closing the French windows, and sat down at one end of the Chesterfield. He decided to leave the spoon in her lap. He was not exactly waiting, he felt. It did not matter anyway, because he had already decided to walk.

He decided to keep to his route and reach the lake by circling round the back of the house. He decided he wouldn't let her in the house—not under any circumstances. In a spirit of mutinous resistance, he climbed the steep grassy slope to the bridge, and when he stood on the driveway, he decided he would stay there and wait until something significant happened to him.

After waiting a while he decided to turn back.

For some reason, 'the golden autumnal night' was a phrase that kept repeating itself in his mind as he looked at her hair, and he liked it so much that he decided to incorporate it into his new novel once he sat down the next day to go over the outline. Still, with his own confusions, he could certainly imagine disliking a book so much that he decided to do something, decided to sort this shit out, by banning it or burning it or by getting hold of its author and beating him up.

The title lettering, the illustrated cover, the pages *bound*—in that word alone he felt the attraction of the neat, limited and controllable form he had left behind when he decided to write a play. Whether he had any talent for fictional prose remained arguable, perhaps; but he was definitely no good at all with brown paper and string. Nonetheless, he was decided. He even raised his chin for a moment in simple heroism. His nostrils widened.

An hour decidedly passed.

His head still swam. He decided that this foolishness must stop, or things would go even worse. She laughed lightly, and it didn't seem faked, and they squeezed hands again. He decided to change the topic, hoping for a softer reaction. Then he decided to tell her. He decided to be playful too. He decided to get to the point. He explained that it was entirely his fault the rehearsals fell apart, because halfway through he had decided to become a novelist. There was indulgent laughter, more applause, then Charles announced that it was dinner.

He was very generous with other people, but he was horribly impatient. He set his own standards for how much of his time and patience everyone deserved. He could be painstakingly sweet, until he decided he'd been sweet enough. Then he turned and came roaring back the other way. 'A strong-minded bitch,' he said. 'Terrifically attractive. Loves to make up her mind. Once decided, decided forever. What a will power. It's a type.' Yes, it must be something like that, he decided. He declared with rage that every living soul was a whore.

Dying men rarely scream. They haven't the energy. He knew. He decided he would make her live. Still, he had decided to live. And finally there was the sleepless night, when he decided to explore and fight the foul, inadmissible abyss.

*He closes the notebook and places it gently on the table.*

A beautiful collaboration, I think you'll agree. From these men—dead and living—I am finally learning to be resolute.

*FADE to black.*

*FADE up to the same man at the same desk in the same interior, with brightly coloured leaflets piled about the desk.*

I've never discriminated, as you know, between types of writing. In fact, my archive of marketing copy, instruction manuals, takeaway menus, entertainments flyers, product advertisements, event programmes, instruction manuals, rulebooks, company articles, patents, technical reports and ephemera towers over my collection of classic novels. I know for most people this is an avalanche of shit. And I would agree, much of it is the incontinence of commerce. More scholarly people call it 'grey literature', and I can see how they too might want to merge it into a singular sludge. But as any stool connoisseur will know, there are many shades of grey and brown and taupe and green. And don't get me started on the textures...

I'm sorry. Jeffrey tells me people don't like to be reminded of their bodies, but I find it difficult to ignore myself.

*He sifts excitedly through the drifts of typographic and photographic material.*

But look at the language these copywriters use, the emotions they manufacture through words and design, the decisions they help us make. Take the authoritative terseness of this rulebook, for instance. Who would dream of transgressing its laws? And the bold red graphics of this family chicken bucket flyer are such a good-humoured call by a fond and capable uncle to the family table. Who could resist? And this wine list! It's a synesthetic poem that kept me rooted to my barstool for days.

This stuff is manna to the uncreative writer, because although teams of 'professional creatives' have been employed to produce it, it doesn't fall under the legislation itself. It is deemed to be functional, and therefore not literature. So I can stitch, weave, filter, interpose, extrapolate, remix, stretch, bifurcate, entangle, unfold, overlay, extract, percolate, fillet, arbitrate, renegotiate and generally ravage the phrases I find amongst

the ‘shit’, remoulding them into the most fragrant passages while still remaining entirely within the law. Listen to this:

*He picks up a notebook and reads:*

New!

New!

Original!

New!

*He puts down the notebook and addresses us directly.*

Like Jeffrey says, everything’s been done before, but there’s absolutely nothing to stop you deciding to do it again. The best content is out there already, and all you need to do is reach out and take it for yourself.

Uncreative writing has helped me help myself—and what’s more, it’s helping curb cultural overproduction too. Try it today. Together we can write, and read, responsibly.

*FADE to black.*

*FADE UP to text, white on black:*

This film was brought to you by the Uncreative Writing Board of Best Practice

*FADE to black.*

*FADE UP to text, white on black:*

The script was made out of 100% recycled words and phrases

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*FADE up to text, white on black:*



If you have been affected by any of the issues presented in this film you can contact the UWBBP on +44 1624 822 229

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*FADE up to text, white on black:*

Please write responsibly

*FADE to black*