The Creation

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The Creation
By T. Lane Williams

Three hours staring at a blank page. We’ve all been there. A deadline looms and yet nothing blooms to take its place within the vast white space which we are to fill with the black ink of our thoughts.

This is where I exist at this moment, in this moment. The clock ticks by the moments before I am to submit my nonfiction assignment and yet, here I type extemporaneously. I hope that from my thoughts an actual paper is unearthed from the crevices of my consciousness.

What do we do when the well runs dry or the scent of the trail grows cold? Or, rather, what do I do because each of us has their own method to their madness. I’ve read about writers who structure their time; they wake at the same time each day and sit at their desk the same hours, day in and day out. They may write one word. They may write a novel. They may stare at a white page for days on end. The point is they see writing as a calling, a duty, a discipline which must be set forth. Other writers shun the rigid regimen and dash off to seedy pubs and bars, seeking the pulse of the people and imagine they are sidling up to Hemingway, Baldwin, or James in some experiment of people watching. But what do I do? Better yet, what will I do this time?

Coffee sounds good.

Black. Columbian. An extra scoop of grounds. No cream, no sugar. Hot, nearly to the point of boiling. McDonald’s hot. Not McDonald’s 2023, but McDonald’s before the multimillion-dollar lawsuit HOT. The kind of hot that peels off the top layer of skin from the palate of my mouth. My tongue slides over the fresh, raw pinkness and my nerves tickle at the sensation. I hope that by revealing the fresh flesh that I, too, am tickled into revelation with new thoughts to jot. However, my sacrifice is for naught.

Well, at least I’m awake.

What’s in the refrigerator? Leftover chili. Yogurt. Cottage Cheese. Apples. Onions. Some kind of vegetable oil spread that passes for butter substitute. Oranges. Tortilla chips and woven wheat crackers are miniature tombstones atop the white crypt. The bare white façade of the door waits for more to be buried within. The same as the white page on the screen at my computer. Dueling blancos, both challenging me.

I think about how this emptiness – of the fridge, of the page – and the desire to fill it, it somehow matches my younger self. There were years I experienced manic depression in which nothing seemed to satisfy my hunger for ‘normalcy.’ Thankfully, I never turned to alcohol or illicit drugs, but during many years when the white brilliance of the sun was so dimmed by the length and depth of my emotional tunnel that I tried to eat my way full, to fill what ached from barrenness. It was something learned in my youth from my mother. The machinations of our mental manipulations drilled our depression around the same time – though she in her late-thirties and me in my teens. We fed the demon which bore out insides and, in turn, grew to monstrous sizes.

Still to this day, forty years later, we both have issues with weight management. The chain of depression continues to rattle and holds fast, though the number of links change, letting out more length and giving us a sense of greater freedom than that which we really have. Was it Charlotte Perkins Gilman, first wave feminist and author, who used her own wading within depression’s dark waters as inspiration for some of her work? She would not be the first, not was she the last.

An orange.

I’ll try an orange. Especially now that I have a cleansed palate. The citric acid alights the neural receptors of the sense of touch. Still, though, the sugary sourness of its juice takes the pain and partners it with pleasure.
The thin, narrow line that is my cursor comes in and out of existence as if the whiteness is not a page, but an allegory for the snowfall that occurs outside my window. Four to five inches, they say. Four to five pages, my instructor wants. Blink. Wink. Hint. Nudge. Know what I mean?

Still though, unlike the blizzard of small white particles filling the darkened evening landscape – the white space remains unfettered – a free and open space for anyone to travel and yet like some back county road in Nevada, not a sign of intelligent life to be seen.

Nevada.

Las Vegas. Gonzo. Hunter S. Thompson injected his own inspiration, writing from the percolated stream which fountained forth from his drug-fueled consciousness. Objectivity be damned, pass the Daniels.

I once wasn’t as disciplined with writing as I am now. I still have a lot of room to improve. Thinking back, again to my youth, my yearbook teacher signed the inside back cover of my copy, “Remember, ‘Deadline’ is an important thing.” I always left things to the last minute (and the first minute after it was due). Waiting until the last minute only invites failure. Sure, if you’re good (which I think I have the capacity to be), you can get by for a while – but not every time. It took my work in campaigns and theatre, learning to ‘plan my work and work my plan’ and move beyond procrastination (most of the time).

The end is the beginning.

Start with the end and schedule what needs to happen for success to occur, then schedule what needs to happen before that, and so on, until you reach the moment of when you are to start. For campaigns, start with envisioning the victory speech on election night and work your way back to the first phone call asking for a campaign contribution or knocking on the first door of a voter. For theatre, start with opening night and work your way back through tech week, rehearsal off book, set builds, costume fittings, blocking rehearsals, the first table read, and auditions. Author John Irving, whose works have seemed to spur their own cottage industry in film adaptations, more often than not, starts by writing the end of his story first.

For me, however, the story is alive. I may have visions of what I want in the end, but the characters make their own choices and their own destinies. They take over my thoughts, feelings, and fingers. They whisper in my ear their desires, dreams, and what the world holds for them. I am but their transcriptionist. Perhaps that is why the pallor of the page keeps me in the dark. This assignment is not the story of Elwood or Madeleine or Amina... it’s me. Give me a microphone and I can fill the airwaves with anecdotes, advice, and audacity.

On paper, as in life, I’m white.

I toy with the idea of experimenting with ChatGPT to see what some algorithm may assemble from the many patterns on the internet what I might say about my life. For some modern-day monstrosity to come alive – electrified – filled with more humanity than the person which they are meant to represent. To challenge me and the meaning of my life and bring it to bear onto this unbearable whiteness, the cold and vast whiteness of being that is a page. Challenged like young Mary Shelley, who wrote the modern Prometheus, on an afternoon shared with her husband Percy Shelley, as well as Lord Byron. It was the Year Without a Summer (1816) on a cold and rainy day when a small group of friends and loved ones shared gothic tales and ghost stories. From the foam of inspirations shore, sprung her creation – Victor Frankenstein and his want to overcome death. For man to find immortality. In doing so, she achieved her own immortality through her words.

Another hour trudges by and the page is no longer a stark arctic glacier. Sometimes it’s good to seek out new experiences. Sometimes it’s good to bare your soul. Sometimes it’s good to have a regimen. Sometimes it’s good to have a plan. Sometimes it’s good to wade in the stream. Sometimes it’s an amalgamation that comes to life. As for this creation, like Shelley’s original mad doctor, I work alone to
bring it to life – no assistant Algôr graverobbing the assemblages of others. Alive! It lives; it metamorphoses the invisible whiteness between me and the reader into something perceptible.

It is not bad; only time will tell if it is good.