

Title: Narcissists, Solipsists, or Creative Writers?

*Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia. —E. L. Doctorow*

There are three types of writers: those who write for others, those who write because it is required, and those who write for themselves. I will start with the first camp: creative writers and would-be novelists. The problem with this group, and society at large for that matter, is that we define writing all too often as a product and not as a process. Writing should not be something that we put in a display case to tantalize passersby with bright colors and flashy titles—though too often the product of writing succumbs to these symptoms—rather, writing is a mode of being, of interpretation, of meditation, and of communication with the deepest corners of our souls. That is one of the greatest paradoxes of creative writing: we write for ourselves as if the whole world were watching. The act of writing is deeply intimate. It's a lover's long embrace. It's the whispers in one's ear which send shivers down the spine. It's the feeling of belonging that comes when we sit in front of our own hearth with hands entwined. But creative writers are unfaithful; we have affairs. We go out and share what is most sacred with anyone—everyone. We are oxymorons: shy exhibitionists. We market not what we make, but what we are. It's a product that degrades our relationship with ourselves, not because it is untrue, but because we are. In Dante's work, the lowest rings of Hell were not reserved for maniacal murderers but for betrayers. Do we not betray ourselves?

The other two camps of writers diverge after we come to this realization—this crossroads if you will. One comprehends the conflict of interest and files divorce papers. It is a swift break-up, and they lose only half their assets. They retain a professional working relationship with writing because they must: they are editors, journalists, reporters, and business writers. They do not cross lines. They do not flirt with tempting notions of infusing their work with the core of

their identities. It's a nine-to-five where they can use their brains instead of their hearts and then go home to their true loves. They play it safe, but I am reminded that *Fortuna audaces iuvat* (Fortune favors the brave), and while this type has my acknowledgment, they do not have my admiration. They are the "bloodless academics" who say what they do not believe and who Nietzsche so heavily criticized. For this reason, it is the last group that has my utmost respect.

The final family of writers are true writers. They marry young and remain faithful. They do not dream of forcing their spouse to "marry the world." Nor do they look to make their partner work to support their own interests. They grow old together away from the spotlight; they become prolific without any traces of pride. They look back on a lifetime spent in one another's company with no regrets. They do not need to say they are in love because they are not trying to prove anything to others or themselves. As Keats would say, "it comes to them as naturally as leaves do to a tree." These writers are committed and quiet, profound and private. Sometimes they hear a youngster plotting to get fame and fortune who suggests that they should sell their children. These upstarts are more in love with the idea of being a writer than they love the actual process of writing; they enjoy wearing the poet's hat (to borrow a phrase from Annie Dillard) more than they enjoy poetry. But this old and wise pair just laughs. They say to those who sell themselves that being together is its own reward.