

May 2020 Newsletter

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President's Column

By Leah Hinton

Hello writers,

Here we are three months into sheltering in place. Some are daring to creep out little by little, others are staying in, prudently putting health first, and others of us are “essential” and the only part of our lives that has changed is the social end of our days, and of course we now work with a modicum of trepidation.

I am one of those “essential workers” yet I don't do anything anyone other than my boss would consider essential. I drive my commute every day, albeit with less traffic. I see clients and warehouse workers and my fellow employees. Only now

there are masks and gloves and extreme side-eye when someone (usually me) clears their throat.

I'm essential, but I'm not saving lives. I'm not protecting the citizenry, I'm not resuscitating great Aunt Bertha even though she's had a bit of a cough and maybe ran a fever three nights ago. No, I am counting someone else's money. I am billing and paying and keeping the wheels turning for a company that delivers fresh fruit and vegetables and other pantry staples to people who aren't able to go out. Don't get me wrong. I am proud of my work. It's just at this point in this pandemic, I'm no longer sure where I belong or what is my purpose. But I soldier on, as do all of you. I even celebrated my birthday in quarantine. (I got a puppy and that's a sunshiney gift regardless of the times.)

I have encouraged you all to use this time to learn and write — but it's hard, isn't it? It is for me. There are so many unknowns. And I'm a planner kind of girl. It's like rubbing a cat the wrong way. It just doesn't feel right.

I am also waging war against finals in classes I never foresaw ending with online discussion boards and a clinical, almost lonely feel. Was this even the same semester I signed up for at the beginning of the year? In its dreariness it doesn't feel likely, despite evidence to the contrary.

But don't think my melancholy, this introspection, or the sentimental reminiscing I'm doing as of late will excuse you all from writing. As a matter of fact, I'm going to derail your best-laid plans of binge watching Netflix and eating another yummy snack in your pajamas with a new assignment.

Write a letter.

Not an email.

Not a text.

Not a blog post.

A letter.

Yes Virginia, a real, honest-to-goodness, pen-to-paper, stuffed-in-an-envelope-and-taken-to-post letter.

This week I received a handwritten letter, the first in ages — at least the first of 2020. I read it again and again. The words were written in a quick script, parts barely legible, lines crooked and scaling upwards as if climbing the face of Everest. And I loved every word. I was grateful for every second the sender put into that brief sentiment. I appreciated the effort. It made me feel valuable. And that's quite a feeling.

In this time where we are all disconnected to a certain degree, connect again through handwritten correspondence. Write on anything. Fancy stationery is not required. But if you've got some, it's better used than left in your drawer.

Here is an article about letter writing which sums it up better than I.

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.tennessean.com/amp/3081168001>

Now I must get back to preparing for finals and slogging through the online testing process. More than anything I pray you are well— of body and spirit.

And don't lose sight of the fact we are all in this together, and you DESERVE your art!

Til next time,

Leah

WGT Board Members

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If you're interested in volunteering, please email us at writersguildtx@gmail.com or ask at the next general meeting!

Online Meeting Reminder



Join us Monday, May 25, 7:00pm, on the WGT Facebook Page for a Facebook Live Presentation:

Wherefore Art Thou, Finished Novel? Fall in Love with Writing Again:

by Shayla Raquel.

From self-doubt to burnout, learn how to get out of your slump and conquer that novel. More words written, no poison necessary.

An expert editor, best-selling author, and book marketer, Shayla Raquel works one-on-one with authors and business owners every day. A lifelong lover of books, she has edited over 400 books and has launched several Amazon best sellers for her clients.

Her award-winning blog teaches new and established authors how to write, publish, and market their books.

She is the author of the Pre-Publishing Checklist, "The Rotting" (in *Shivers in the Night*), and *The Suicide Tree*. Her newest book is *The 10 Commandments of Author Branding*. In her not-so-free time, she acts as organizer for the Yukon Writers' Society, volunteers at the Oklahoma County Jail, and obsesses over squirrels. She lives in Oklahoma with her dogs, Chanel, Wednesday, and Baker.

April Meeting Recap

The monthly meeting held online April 27 featured "The Montpelier Job: A Study in Heist Novels" presented by Lauren Vanderburg.

Still viewable on the Writers Guild of Texas Facebook Page, Lauren's talk focused on what makes a good heist novel work. She noted that in a good heist story, we the audience find ourselves rooting for members of a gang inevitably trying to pull off something very illegal. So why does it work when it works?

Lauren highlighted elements that must be in place for us to react counter to the moral code we typically apply to such a situation. First, there has to be a

compelling reason why the team is undertaking the heist, something beyond garden-variety greed. As she put it, with the heist novel, there has to be sufficient emotional resonance with the characters and their motivations for us to accept the story as reality.

She talked about the two-foldness of character, a term coined by Murray Smith, who said that, to engage with the novel, we must experience the reality of the character as they fit into the story, as well as the character as a fictional construct. The two are distinguishable but inseparable.

She referred to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous quote on the "willing suspension of disbelief," "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature." Perhaps it shouldn't amaze us if these principals still apply to stories written today.

Lauren isolated character types, or roles, that typically people a modern heist novel. These include the mastermind (like the George Clooney character in *Ocean's Eleven*), the partner in crime, and the tech guru. She then focused on several examples of contemporary heist novels to further explore the genre.

What's the bottom line with a successful heist novel, what makes it work? As she put it, "Along with fun and escape, the characters have to have a thread of true emotion running through them." In other words, we have to believe in and care about what happens to them to become invested in the heist itself. Ultimately, the novel has to present something "complex, amazing, and bigger than the sum of its parts."

Thanks to Lauren Vanderburg for a thought-provoking presentation.

Notes From the Editor

The WGT Critique Group, online version, holds its next meeting Wednesday, May 20, at 7pm. Once again we will use Webex to dive into the work, register our

observations, and encourage writers in their latest efforts.

Let us know if you plan to attend by responding to the Facebook event that will go up shortly on the WGT Facebook page, or by emailing us at writersquildtx@gmail.com. Looking forward to another session.

Till next time, happy storytelling.

—Gary
