**Reviving the Art of Writing**

A look at the importance of theme in fiction

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## I. Introduction: A Lost Art

Something fundamental has been lost by the ability to self-publish. The free market of book publishing has drastically increased the quantity of books published every year, and it has drastically decreased the quality of books published every year. When anyone thinks he or she has the “right” to be a published author, the credibility of writing as an *art* becomes utterly undermined. The fact of the matter is that authoring and publishing a book is not a right—it is a privilege that should be granted to those that have something profound to contribute. In 2010, more than three million books were published in the U.S., meaning that more than three million people thought they had something new to contribute to the American collection of art. Of these, 2.7 million were published “nontraditionally,” i.e. self-published books, reprints of public domain works and other print-on-demand books.[[1]](#footnote-1) The result of dumbing down art—and literature certainly falls under that category—is the dumbing down of our entire culture and society. Art is meant to be a *unique* ideal. It is meant to be a manifestation of some elemental truth conveyed through the raw talents of the talented. Not everyone that thinks he is actually is talented. The Internet has certainly helped foster that illusion as it has only inflated American self-obsession.

When we take the art out of media that have traditionally been artistic expressions, we are taking away a source of social refinement. Don’t get me wrong, reading is and always will be an important means of learning. Books—no matter how thematically meaningless they are—teach people vocabulary, sentence structure, and may even teach them about plain old life. However, a serious caveat comes along with self-publication: there is no one to ensure that the vocabulary, sentence structure and lessons about life are accurate. Nonetheless, reading is good for the brain. But there is more to reading than simply learning new words or another kind of thing or two. Books have traditionally been art in story form that relays some truth about life. The craft of creating a story that does this is too difficult for just any writer to do. A person cannot go to school to become a writer, just as he cannot go to school to become an artist. It is an inborn talent—a component of a person—that comes from genes, the gods, or some other mystery. Being an artist is a right insofar as you are born with the skills to be one. Otherwise, the desire to be a writer can be fulfilled through blogging, newswriting or textbook writing—something that doesn’t necessarily require talent and won’t contribute to the degradation of the arts.

The results of increasing non-traditional book publishing are grave, and they reflect quite poignantly this notion that the unfiltered influx of books degrades art in the form of literature. One report notes that book sales are falling quickly: in 2011, print sales declined by 17.1 percent, outweighing even e-book sales, which increased by 117.3 percent.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nonfiction adult book sales are declining rapidly, which speaks to the falling demand of intellectually stimulating books in the U.S. Instead, Americans are becoming wont to purchase books like the *Twilight* series and *Fifty Shades of Grey*—books that hardly do much to activate any kind of real thought. Further, book categories “have become entirely saturated, with a surplus of books on every topic.”[[3]](#footnote-3) While the marketplace of ideas is a good things, I fear the amount of books without any literary merit are outweighing and therefore crippling the prospects of the books that do contain literary merit. The market place of ideas is, in essence, corrupted by an influx of idiocy. Too much of anything is never a good thing—even and perhaps especially in a free market.

Once upon a time, people would tell their children to go read a book instead of watching TV. But now the quality of books hardly rivals the quality of television shows offered today. There’s often more to learn from sitting in front of the tube for hours than there is reading a novel published by someone whose primary desire is to make money. Art is not about meeting the demand of the mob; it is about revolutionizing the demand and challenging that mob to think differently, see differently, want differently. Books today cater to the lowest denominator—to the people that don’t want to think, learn or experience a challenge. Good authors that do produce this kind of work have lost to the scavengers who have reduced the art of writing to a mere career. Writing novels is not a career; it is a duty to a person’s society. A real writer, a real artist, is the eyes and ears of a society that is generally deaf and dumb but all too ostentatious. Artists are teachers or sages, with a lesson to reveal about the way life works. Indeed, humanity’s story is told through the art of writing and images. It embodies what is and what should be. By allowing the general quality of literature to decline, we are doing a disservice to humanity. We are providing easiest access to empty, mindless entertainment at the expense of promoting real literature that is full and intellectually provocative.

But what exactly is real, good literature? What is literary merit? This article will seek to answer those questions through an exploration of those fiction novels that have surpassed their times as some of the greatest in history. I will analyze novels I have read that have made the top-100 lists of *TIME* and the *New York Times*. Each of the novels in this study is developed around a strong, often complex and timeless theme. And without doubt, each of the novels is written with the skill and finesse of a true literary artist. The authors of the best novels prove that becoming a writer is not something anyone can choose to do. It is for those who are endowed with the creative spirit that renders them unique and revolutionary in some way.

## II. The Right to Write

Anyone can write. Just like anyone can paint. In fact, anyone can learn how to write. It’s a process we go through from kindergarten through college (if we get there). Writing is a skill that we can never stop learning. But whether anyone can write *well* is a whole other story. Some people certainly are born or can become better writers than others, but so few will ever claim the title of master. Indeed, the list of the greatest authors has hardly grown over the centuries, and there are even fewer rising up through the ranks today. That may be because the population is too distracted to read or write good, compelling literature. Or it may be because one out of four high school graduates is not even functionally literate.[[4]](#footnote-4) Whatever the reason, we can be sure that the top-selling books today are typically not written by authors that will be lauded as greats many years later.

I filtered the books I plan to analyze—collectively and some individually—in this article by only choosing books written in the twentieth century. This leaves out many of the greatest fiction books ever written, of course, but what holds for these more contemporary novels certainly is true of those novels of the more distant past. Theme and eloquence of prose are essential to story writing, no matter the age and no matter the era. Each of the books I have chosen exemplifies this in some important way.

Before I continue on, an important caveat is in order. Discussions of art are mere philosophical discussions with no right and no wrong answer according to the cosmos. Only according to the discussers are there rights and wrongs. For example, this entire paper could be consumed by a discourse on the definition of art, but that is outside the scope of the issues I *do* want to discuss. Furthermore, whatever constitutes “good” writing and “bad” writing is utterly made up of opinion, no matter how many facts or statistics might be used to prove the point. Someone who becomes giddy at the thought of ordering some cheesy-titled genre novel online or thinks that *Fifty Shades of Grey* is the most beautiful thing they’ve ever read has valid opinions, because the authors of those kind of books can use their monthly paycheck as proof that my idea of “good literature” is bullshit. But looking at the number of sells a book makes when it’s hot off the press is *not* my idea of an appropriate gauge for what is good writing and what is not. Like our dear old Founding Fathers, I have so little faith in the mob.

Those novels that, for me—and for many other literature lovers, fall into the category of Great are those that have lasted. They’re the novels that are *still* selling after decades or even centuries. They’re the novels deemed so important to society that children around the country are virtually forced to read them—Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a classic example. To use the corniest and yet most apt analogy: a good novel is like true love. It isn’t just the burning flame of the beginning, because we all know those quickly die. A good novel lasts—it’s more like warm embers that never go out, no matter how many days pass, because someone will always come around to stoke them a bit. Someone always needs them, to stay warm or to see something in the dark. Thus no author could show me a pretty paycheck and expect me to assume their book was an excellent contribution to the American literature collection.

By this gauge of “great,” we can begin to look at the components of a novel that push it to this standard. But to decode the components of a novel, it is absolutely necessary that we never pretend that the novel is independent of its author. This, in fact, is the first requirement of good literature—that it is an extension of the writer. Without this connection between creator and creation, author and book, artist and art, the spirit of the work is lost. I firmly believe this—as esoteric as it may sound. I do not believe that a book may be well written, transcending time and place, and acting as a hand that propels or caresses the reader without that book being at least in part the embodiment of the human that wrote it. An author cannot write anything authentic that he has not experienced in some way and in some capacity—whether it is physical, emotional or philosophical.

This idea that the author must be connected to his or her work is my rendition of George Orwell’s first motive for writing as he lists them in his essay *Why I Write.* He claims that “sheer egoism” is what makes the writer really tick. Like all people, Orwell claims, all people want their legacy on display for when they’re gone (or while they’re living). Writing is a manifestation of vanity and self-centeredness. This is certainly true, but I think it goes without saying. Everyone does anything out of pride. We are, by nature, egoistic creatures who thrive on our own self-obsession, especially because we’re American. In fact, it is this egoism that compels too many people who are not worthy of the title to become so-called writers. Some people, like Orwell himself, are warranted in their egoism as writers. Others, however, are definitely not.

No, the true author’s primary motive for writing is not egoism but a more internal, almost spiritual drive to write. Like other historically renowned artists, writers do not simply *want* to write—they need to. Like Michelangelo, they need to free the stories and the people from the marble block. Their work is not merely words on paper for the value of entertainment. Their work is an expression of life in a way humans most closely experience it: through story, through narrative, through dialogue. Aside from the message the writer wants to convey, there is this deep and inherent need to write. This is the writer’s creative fuel. Books whose authors lack this spirit are dry, empty. They may be entertaining, but they are not *moving* or provocative. They may evoke laughter or tears, but they don’t change anything in the reader or give him or her any real insight. These books are simply placebos with half-hearted effects.

The author’s compulsion to write does not mean that he loves it. He may love it like a masochist loves pain. Writing is rarely a joyride, and when it is, it is perhaps far too simple. How long it took to write something does not indicate how hard it was to write. When the author comes out frazzled at the end but somehow more alive than she was when she began—she is a real writer. Chipping away at the marble block is tough work, even if you can see the faces of the people inside right there in your mind. When the artist gets down to it, it’s the veins in the hands that matter the most and the way the muscle curves in the shin. It’s the shape of the lips as they connect to the nose. It’s all the finer details that must whisper important meanings and truths about humanity when an admirer stands and looks up at the silent, stoic statue.

When a person is endowed with this gift—with the impulse to create that is so great it cannot be suppressed, no matter how difficult it is to get the words out and to get them right—then he has the right to write. Only then does he have the right to contribute to humanity’s collective unconscious, because such a contribution should never be taken lightly.

## III. Other Motivations and Their Implications

Orwell writes of three other motivations that compel the author to write: aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose. Aesthetic enthusiasm refers to the authors love of the way words form on paper. It is the “perception of beauty” as it reveals itself through the order of words in a sentence, the flow of prose in a story, or the pleasure of some sounds. This is, undoubtedly, the poet’s most weighty motive, for even the deepest, profoundest and most complex truths are expressed in the fewest and choicest words. But every great writer throughout history—from Shakespeare to Dickens to Fitzgerald to Orwell himself—writes in a way that is pleasing and harmonious, even when it is jarring. The aesthetic enthusiasm, which I believe every writer feels, has implications for how great works are determined. When the author has an affinity and skill for the order and placement of words—the diction, syntax, and revelation of detail—everything in the novel becomes important. Even words or phrases that seem to have no utilitarian purpose, in fact, do. Writers write in a way that conveys the underlining message without spelling it outright. Formal literary analyses prove this. There is no such thing as a needless word, phrase or sentence in a well-written novel. Every letter and space and punctuation serves a purpose.

The second motive that writers experience for writing is the historical impulse. By this, Orwell meant that writers have a desire “to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity.” This is all he says on the matter, but I think this impulse warrants a few more words. The best books capture a moment in time and make it timeless. They capture the essence of a period or moment so that it reveals the most elemental nature of humanity. Consider books like the *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, to name a few. Each of these books is read by high school students across the country because they use history to teach us not only about history (from perhaps a non-traditional perspective) but also about the present. Novels are inherently bound by a setting—whether it is in the past, in the present or in the future. They are bound by that setting and therefore use time in a purposeful manner to reveal some universal theme.

Lastly, and similarly to the latter, Orwell writes of the political purpose of writing. He uses the word political “in the widest possible sense.” By it he means the author is motivated to persuade the world to accept some truth or some leaning. It is the author’s desire to “alter other peoples’ idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.” This political purpose is the stuff of a theme, the primary driving force behind any great novel. The theme comes out of the writer’s creative spirit, weaves itself into the aesthetics of the novel, punctuates the historical context and makes or breaks the story’s ability to be great. The importance of theme to the novel is such that every element of the narrative contributes to the making or deciphering of it. This is the primary reason that good novels cannot merely have good plots, or good characters, or good prose, or any other one good thing. The novel, in its entirety, must be excellent in order for the theme to be strong, memorable, revelatory, and invincible to time.

## IV. Defining a Strong Theme

Certain books last through time because they speak to humanity in way that other books just don’t. Books that last carry with them a sense of profundity that cannot be erased by time. The adage that “those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it” is very much the thing that drives great writers to write great novels. Too often history, in the form of textbooks, is riddled with bias as it is presented as neutral. Books allow the author to claim his or her bias and use it to make an important point. In other words, fiction authors humanize history and they humanize the complicated facts of life. Further, they serve as a medium through which otherwise silenced voices may be heard. Authors are like social scientists that ignore statistics and data and write from the gut instinct that is born through their experience. We as a society *need* fiction authors to remind us of the past and, more specifically, to remind us of the human element of the past. We tend to view history and the people in history in static terms (which is largely a failure of school curriculum, but that’s far outside the scope of this paper). In reality, history is the culmination of billions of narratives. The people of history cannot be reduced to historical figures; we must be constantly reminded that at one point they were breathing and thinking, loved and hated; they sat on toilets or in outhouses, ate food and drank. They aren’t statues; they’re *humans.*

A strong theme is one that teaches humans about themselves. Great books are mirrors that show our true image—as ugly, as convoluted, as disfigured and as beautiful as it is. Authors, unlike textbooks writers, don’t have the motive of making anyone look good or building social or national morale and unity. The best authors are the cynics that unabashedly tell their audience: “We need to get our shit together, and here’s how.” Someone’s got to do it. That the writer can do it best endows the job with even more significance and import. Not just anyone has the insight to determine what’s wrong in the world and, especially, how to fix it. Not everyone as that element of insight that makes the artist. It should be left to those that do, lest society get a dumbed down version of what’s really going on. That seems to happen *far* too often—by American media especially.

In pedagogy, examples seem to be the most effective way of demonstrating some idea or concept. I have selected a number of novels from the lists of the top 100 books, according to *TIME* and the *New York Times*, that I have read. Each of these books will demonstrate what exactly a strong theme is and how a strong theme is distinct from a weak one.

The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s book is unforgettable for several reasons. For one, Fitzgerald’s talent in writing is eloquent and brilliant. Moreover, the storyline and perspective are uniquely constructed to convey a complex theme. *The Great Gatsby* is a commentary on the degradation of the great “American Dream” in the 1920s. The prosperity and materialism of the era was being corrupted by the moral decay. The people of Fitzgerald’s novel are greedy, cynical and hollow. The novel speaks to the slippery slope of greed and the American obsession with excess. Acquiring wealth, like power, tends to leave a person hungry only for more. Soon he finds that he has lost everything else. The American Dream has thus shifted from a pursuit of happiness—as the Founders themselves spoke of it—to one of cheating to obtain material wealth. There are no heroes in *The Great Gastby*, no protagonist to save the day. The decline of Americans’ morals is married to the rise in material wealth. The two cannot be divorced.

Fitzgerald’s novel presents human nature in a very time-specific setting only to show that even modernity cannot thwart the inherent greed of man. History has shown that “power is always dangerous. Power attracts the worst and corrupts the best.”[[5]](#footnote-5) What makes *The Great Gatsby* such a powerful novel is its ability to pull the reader into the story—to hate and love every single character in some way and to see him- or herself in Jay Gatsby or Nick Carraway or Daisy Buchanan. People put down *Gatsby* and become aware of their own society in a way that can’t be replicated by mere explanation. Fitzgerald’s novel is an extension of his experience as he lived to see the Roaring Twenties unfold. He was Gatsby, who “fell into a wild, reckless life-style of parties and decadence.”[[6]](#footnote-6) And the course of Fitzgerald’s life certainly parallel’s the theme of *The Great Gatsby.* His wife suffered a nervous breakdown and Fitzgerald became an alcoholic. His obsession with lavish living was his ultimate ruin. His greatest novel reveals that Fitzgerald was conscious of the emptiness of his lifestyle but that he was trapped in it much like his characters.

*The Great Gatsby* was apparently written with all of the motives Orwell lists (and which I have modified a bit). For one, Fitzgerald is deeply connected to the book. That connection shows itself in the aesthetically appealing way the author writes. Further, he writes to capture history—the moment in which he is living—and he captions it with an important political message. He does all of this in such a way that every single component and facet of the novel has *meaning*. It has more than just a purpose of moving the story along or foreshadowing some coming event. Everything—every word, every color, every symbol, every quote—has meaning that contributes to the grander message, the theme of the novel. This is the mark of a great author and a great book. No part of the book is wasted.

1984

There is no doubt that George Orwell’s strongest motive for writing is the political purpose, as demonstrated in his classic novel *1984.* This novel’s plot takes place in an extremist totalitarian society. Orwell used his experience of communism in the Soviet Union to propel him to write a story that horrified and cautioned his audience. While Orwell’s book was no doubt meant to be an alarm for Westerners in 1949, the year of the novel’s publication, it’s a book that still serves as a warning for people today. Like *The Great Gatsby*, it’s a novel that proposes a jarring truth without the sugary coating of a happy ending. Its theme is more than just a statement about reality—it’s a prediction about the terrors to come if his audience refused to awaken enough to stop it. In his portent novel, the totalitarian regime, called the Party, uses different forms of control to effectively ensure that its power is unshakable. Through technology, propaganda, control of the media, and control of language itself, the Party creates robots out of the general population, who do not even have the capacity to think thoughts of rebellion. Those that do slip through the cracks are tortured or they, and any record of them, disappear.

The threat of totalitarianism, or simply the concentration of power into too few hands, knows no end. Though the threat seemed especially potent in Orwell’s time, the themes of *1984* carry on through every generation and every era. Orwell speaks to the danger of complacency and warns that we must be ever vigilant against those who seek to consolidate power—even when they disguise it in notions of equality. Especially troubling is Orwell’s warning about the potential power of technology to threaten individual freedom and privacy. *1984* is a genius novel written well ahead of its time. In fact, the methods that the Party uses in the novel to control the population are so ahead of the times that Orwell’s book still serves as a warning to us about what could be if we’re not careful and attentive.

The signs in *1984* that remind the citizens that “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” have lent themselves to mainstream colloquial phrases. “Big Brother” is synonymous with intrusive government. Orwell’s novel has become so woven into the fabric of popular culture in the U.S. that terms like “Big Brother” are understood even by people who have never read the book. That in itself is a testament to the strength of *1984*’s themes.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest

Ken Kesey’s genius novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* takes the cake for my favorite books of all time. Published in 1962, the book is an absolute product of its time. It’s imaginative, original, and engaging from start to finish. The book captures the spirit of the times with its message of challenging “the system,” which Kesey likens to a machine throughout the story.

The novel springs forth from Kesey’s own experience working in a mental health facility. He uses a unique setting and storyline to capture the spirit of the rebellion in the 1960s. Kesey uses the wicked Big Nurse to shine light on the evil of American institutions through the voice of Chief Bromden, who is a deaf mute. Readers develop a love for Chief, such that his hallucinations—though incredulous—become believable. This is Kesey’s way of revealing the absolute absurdity of the American system.

This American system is the machine that churns out robotic people who conform to whatever society deems “normal.” The hospital is society, and all the mechanisms in place to shape the patients—like group therapy, shock therapy, medication, and lobotomies—is the machine. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is a commentary on the way society takes away the freedom of a person to be who he (and I say he intentionally because the novel is extremely sexist) is. Chief Bromden describes the ward and all the nurses as pieces of the machine whose job is to take individualistic impulses away from the patients so that they can conform and “fit in” to society.

Kesey’s hero is Randal McMurphy, a fiery man whose confidence and vitality have not yet been suppressed by the machine. He brings life to the ward and teaches the men how to be, what Kesey deems, actual men. McMurphy represents the individuality and freedom that Kesey believes is man’s natural way. In the end, however, Big Nurse sends McMurphy to get a lobotomy, thereby destroying the very part of him that makes him an individual. The procedure is Kesey’s final message that society is deliberately oppressive.

The idea that society is like a machine is one that has stayed with the “free-spirits” of every era. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is a potent message to people of every generation to wake up. The novel speaks to the historical marginalization of anyone in the U.S. that is “different” and demands that readers ask themselves who defines normalcy. Means of stealing a person’s individuality and free-will are disguised by agreed-upon rules and regulations that are meant to “protect” society.

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria as the child of a Protestant missionary. His upbringing was a cultural mix of English and traditional Igbo (which he writes as Ibo in his novel). Achebe’s books are a reflection of the kind of life he lived in the post-colonial era in Nigeria. He has been at pains to show the Western world the richness of African culture in response to Western paternalism and ignorance.

The setting of Things Fall Apart is the late 1800s, and the novel captures the conflict between the colonial government and the traditional Igbo people. The novel was written with political intentions: Achebe chose to write it in English to act as a response to inaccurate accounts of African culture by Westerners. Once again, this author follows the motives laid out by Orwell. Further, Achebe’s own stake in writing the novel is deeply personal. He serves as a kind of viceroy for his people.

Things Fall Apart is timeless because it works with the theme of the dichotomous relationship of modernity and tradition and the tensions it causes within societies and individuals. The novel demonstrates the inevitability of change in a globalized world—an inevitability that has become increasingly more frequent as the world shrinks through technology and the global market.

Colonialism has been replaced by imperialism, but the effects are often the same. The traditions of indigenous people become dispensable with the introduction of new technologies or improved methods. Achebe’s novel demonstrates how culture and tradition in a tribal society of developing nation are intricately bound to politics, daily routines, religion, trade and sustenance. Western insensitivity to this has been detrimental to many traditional peoples.

Lord of the Flies

William Golding’s 1954 novel was born from the author’s experience in World War II. This war established for the world the extent to which human evil could prevail, and Lord of the Flies is an allegorical rendition of this reality. The novel explores human nature through the way a group of boys, stranded on an island, grapples with the challenges of their circumstances. The problem of evil is an especially potent theme in the book as the boys become savages in the game of survival. Human nature takes two different manifestations. Some of the boys work communally and others strive for anarchy and brutality.

Coming out of the chaotic era of World War II, Golding strives to illustrate how the impulses within human nature can preserve peace or disrupt it. The stark chasm between what is “good” and what is “evil” becomes strictly defined after WWII as the world received information about the heinous acts committed. Ralph represents good, whereas Jack represents evil—the desire for power at the expense of others’ lives and wellbeing. Lord of the Flies reveals, however, that savagery is a much more natural tendency for humans and that people are innately selfish, barbaric and cruel.

Golding’s novel is not just a classic example of good versus evil. He writes Lord of the Flies as an allegory, in which every character and every motif has a purpose and a meaning. Furthermore, the book serves as a kind of post-conflict commentary that takes from a major event a lesson about the human psyche at the individual level. His novel can explain much of the evil that happened before WWII and the evil that has happened thereafter. Innocence can never be preserved because humans will naturally digress into barbarism. Though societies may progress, they will always be slaves to the innate evil with the people that comprise them.

Great Themes

Each of the books I have listed above serve as an example of novels with strong themes. They are strong because of their timeless quality. Not only do the authors use their books to comment on the times in which they live, but they offer great insights into which direction society is headed. The authors possess an insight that surpasses what ordinary writers possess, and they have the skill to convey the complex messages they need to convey. Their themes are portending. They take their audiences out of the maze so that they can see what is actually happening, where the maze is actually taking them. For this reason, great writers are society’s greatest necessity. And yet their numbers are dwindling.

Authors of great books are creative geniuses who see the world in the realest kind of light. There are no sugary coats added to their stories. The authors’ motives start at the bottom of Orwell’s list: they have a political purpose they are passionate about sharing. This—the political purpose—is the seed of a great piece of literature. Without it, a story is simply bones. A strong theme serves as the organs and muscles of good fiction—the beating heart of the novel. Rhythmic prose, clever phrasing and eloquence are the skin that holds it all together. Without these components, a novel is utterly lifeless—a book to read and then shove into the coffin at the end.

People don’t wake up one morning and decide over coffee that they want to become a great artist. It’s a drive and an impulse that are born within an artist—just as they are born within a writer. The era of self-obsession in the U.S. has given too many people a false license so that they can feign authorial power. If my college career as a Professional Writing major has taught me anything, it is that not everyone should pick up the pen to write. You can sail through four years of college courses on writing and still fail to be excellent because you lack the authentic compulsion and insight to be a writer. In fact, my Professional Writing career has served as a curt reminder that I should at least put my own pen away until I’m ready and equipped with the wisdom I need to be a good writer before I contribute to the dilution of literature in America.

We should read more great literature so that we can learn to recognize what great writers actually are. We have belittled the title of author to some degenerate “anybody.” The fact of the matter is that a writer is indeed somebody that not anybody can be or become. That so many claim to be—and indeed insist on being—publishable authors confirms that self-obsession has trounced self-reflection in this country, and that will inevitably lead to the further debasement of society. When the arts become generally meaningless—when society values entertainment over ideals—we should all seriously worry. Maybe I’ll write a book about that…

1. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bj-gallagher/book-publishing\_b\_1394159.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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5. Edward Abbey [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/gatsby/context.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)