

**CREATING FICTION :
AN INVESTIGATION
AND
A CASE STUDY**

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AND
A CASE STUDY**

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE MAGISTER ARTIUM IN ENGLISH
OF THE POTCHEFSTROOMSE UNIVERSITEIT VIR CHRISTELIKE HOër
ONDERWYS.**

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Potchefstroom

2000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I wish to acknowledge, first and foremost the assistance of my supervisor, Prof. Annette Combrink, whose insight and input have helped to mould and formalise my own thinking on many of the issues raised in this dissertation. I want to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude for her expert guidance, skill, and vision.
- I would like to thank Martie van der Merwe very much for the skill and patience expended in the formatting and layout of the dissertation.
- I would like to thank Jani van Niekerk for the advice and computer expertise.

SUMMARY

Know thyself!

Socrates

(in Fleming, 1986:476)..

The “quest for light” attempted in this study was motivated by Socrates’s age-old motto which formed the backdrop for an attempt to unravel at least a small part of the mystery surrounding the creative process. The main aim of the research was to promote the evolution of “consciousness” and to broaden the archaic view of what might be perceived as human potential. This was done by investigating the process of artistic creation, specifically fiction. The methodological approach can be termed self discovery (in the form of a case study). Four aspects formed the cornerstones of the research. Firstly, a manuscript was created by resorting to intuitive writing. Secondly, the contribution of the Ariel phase, in creating fiction (mostly a right-brain activity) was explored. An analysis of the manuscript was the third aspect addressed. In the fourth instance, the Caliban phase, the left brain’s contribution to the process was explored. To conclude, it was found that balance and cooperation were the key aspects in the interaction between the two hemispheres to create “excellence” in fiction.

OPSOMMING

Know thyself!

Socrates

(in Fleming, 1986:476).

Hierdie motto van Socrates kan gesien word as die dryfkrag agter hierdie studie wat beoog het om 'n klein deeltjie van die misterie wat kreatiwiteit kenmerk te ontrafel. Die hoofdoel van die studie was om die evolusie van die konsep van die "bewuste", asook die ou idee van wat gesien is as die mens se potensiaal te verbreed. Dit is gedoen deur ondersoek in te stel na kreatiwiteit met betrekking tot fiksie. Die metode wat gevolg kan gesien word as gegrond op ontdekking van die self (in die vorm van 'n gevallestudie). Vier aspekte het die basis van die studie gevorm. Ten eerste is 'n manuskrip geskep deur intuïtiewe skryfkuns. Ten tweede is die Ariel-fase (meestal regter brein aktiwiteite) in die proses ondersoek. 'n Analise van die manuskrip het ten derde gevolg. Vierdens is die Caliban fase, linkerbreinaktiwiteite, in die proses ontsyfer. Ten slotte is gevind dat balans en samewerking van kardinale belang is in die interaksie tussen die linker en regter brein wanneer "uitmuntendheid" die einddoel is in die daarstelling van fiksie.

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The Two-Sided Man

Much I owe to the lands that grew -
More to the Lives that fed -
But most to the Allah Who gave me
Two
Separate sides to my head.
Much I reflect on the Good and the
True
In the faiths beneath the sun
But most to the Allah Who gave me
Two
Sides to my head, not one.
I would go without shirt or shoe,
Friend, tobacco or bread,
Sooner than lose for a minute the two
Separate sides of my head!
- Rudyard Kipling
(in Edwards, 1979:36).

PREFACE

1 Contextualization and problem statement

There has for centuries been an acute interest in the process underlying the creation of literature. Many writers have expressed views and reflections on this topic. One kind of view is captured by Hodge (1988:4) in the following terms: “ ... a mystic and seer with a rare God-given talent. The artist could also be regarded as an alchemist who creates in mysterious ways. These ways in which he creates from the “mists” are the creative process which has always been enshrouded in mystery ... half-seen and mystical in its dartling flight, and illusive and difficult to capture”.

Joseph Heller agrees with this perspective, as he says that “I don’t understand the process of imagination ...” and James Dickey describes this mystery as “... a kind of madness I feel when I’m writing” (in Conrad, 1990:223), and this “madness” of the creative process has also been highlighted by the famous post-impressionist painter, Van Gogh, who was obsessed with the eternal quest for total self-knowledge. In a probing and introspective act of self-analysis, he cut off his ear, an act that must have been intended to express his impression of the irrationality of the creative process which is beyond human understanding (McQuillan, 1998:9). Van Gogh was not the only artist in a quest for light and understanding, because Dürer, Caravaggio and Rembrandt had similar self-

revelations. These artists did not go to such extremes as Van Gogh but were also plagued by the same need for self-analysis propelled by Socrates' age old motto: "Know thyself" (Fleming, 1986:476). The Ancient Greeks were perhaps the first to recognise that this phenomenon or "madness" could not be explained rationally. Horace, the Roman critic, elaborated on this by coining the phrase "mad poet".¹

A poet like Kipling seemed to have an intuitive awareness of the interactive process involved in the creation of literature. In a well-known poem, he refers to the "two separate sides of my head" for which he owes much to Allah(!) ('The Two-sided man', in Edwards, 1979:36). He uses this image to reflect on the act of creativity. Delgado (1985:2) reflects further on this seeming duality with the following allusion: "... a two-headed turtle ... is a perfect image for any creative artist - a soft sensitive nature, a tough outer shell, one head for creation and the other for self-criticism".

In the course of the past century this sort of intuitive awareness of "two sides of the brain" has become rooted in more substantial scientific fact, and views and theories about creative writing have as a sort of commonplace used insights deriving from neuropsychology. Titles of works based on this kind of insight range from *Writing on both sides of the brain* (Klauser, 1987), *Left or right brain?*

¹ Horace (in Dorsch, 1982:94) based his idea on the irrational behaviour of some poets - in particular Empedocles who was seen as a "mad" poet because he wanted to win notoriety by hurling himself into fire. This irrationality surrounding poets and artists therefore led the Ancient Greeks to attribute creativity to gifts bestowed on them by supernatural powers - goddesses called muses. They could open the doors of the imagination by inspiring artists with brilliant insights (Bulfinch, 1981:32).

That is the question (Trampe, 1999), *Acting with both sides of your brain: Perspectives on the creative process* (Delgado, 1985), *Success depends on leaders' "whole brain" thinking* (Hooper, 1992), *Research synthesis on right and left hemispheres: We think with both sides of the brain* (Levy, 1983) to *The unbearable heaviness of lob-sided music education* (Koornhof, 1999).

The brain² consists of two independent mental systems. The right and left hemispheres exist side by side. Unlike the brains of animals whose cerebral hemisphere are alike in appearance and function, human hemispheres which appear to be alike in appearance develop asymmetrically in terms of function. This leads to the fact that the right hemisphere is connected to the left hand and the left hemisphere is connected to the right hand (Edwards, 1979:27).

A thick nerve cable, the *corpus callosum*, is a bundle of fibres cross-connecting the two cerebral hemispheres. Communication between the hemispheres is effected by this link which reconciles the different perspectives, therefore preserving a sense of being one person (Steyn, 1990:17).

Although the two hemispheres are mirror images of each other, on closer inspection Cohen (1996:32) has found that the left hemisphere of the cortex seems to be larger than the right and appears to be wired differently.

² According to physiological research, the human brain, which weighs only three percent or less of the total body mass consumes twenty percent of the body's oxygen intake. One scientist calculated that, in order to duplicate the brain with the technology of 1990, scientists would require "... a building a hundred stories tall - the size of Texas ..." to incorporate the fifteen billion transactions the brain makes every second (Conrad, 1990:234).

According to Edwards (1996:29), both hemispheres of the brain are involved in “... higher cognitive functioning ...” but each half specializes in a certain area and processes information differently. These hemispheres can co-operate with each other or one half can work alone or they could be in conflict (in Conrad, 1990:234).

The right brain’s function is to create. This side of the brain focuses on non-verbal skills, emotions, intuition, synthesis, holism and imagination (fantasy). The mode of processing is rapid, complex, whole-pattern, spatial and perceptual. Innovative thinking is a dominant right brain activity (Delgado, 1985:7).

The left brain’s function, on the other hand, is to assess and evaluate. This half of the brain can be compared to the personal computer. It focuses on verbal skills, logical, analytical and rational thought. The mode of processing is verbal and analytic. Convergent thinking abilities are a dominant left-brain activity (Stringer, 1987:34).

Given this slant that has developed in the thinking about the process of creativity, and more specifically creativity associated with the writing of fiction, it should be possible, using insights derived from neuro-psychological research (but not going into empirical research belonging to that field) to investigate the process underlying the writing of a fictional text and reflect on the process and the product in some way.

2 Research questions

There is, emerging from the foregoing, a clear indication that there are two parallel and interacting ways of knowing. Questions that come to mind in an investigation of the creative process in literature are:

- 1 In what ways has the process of creative writing (specifically fiction) been described?
- 2 What kinds of theories/reflections have been formulated – more specifically, theories involving whole brain function?
- 3 To what extent could such theories/reflections be applied in the investigation of the process of creating fiction?
- 4 Could such an investigation result in a description of the process involved in creating a fiction text?
- 5 Could one then create a text and go some way towards describing the process involved?

3 Research aims

In order to unravel the process of creating fiction by focussing on hemisphere interaction the aims of this study are the following:

- 1 to investigate ways in which the process of creating fiction has been described;

- 2 to determine what theories/reflections have been developed;
- 3 to determine whether such theories/reflections could have a useful application in the investigation of the process of creating fiction; and
- 4 to write a fiction text in order to elucidate and reflect on the different processes involved.

4 Central theoretical statement

The creative process, more particularly with application to fiction, involves the whole brain in concert. However, there is a distinct phasic process in the process of fiction creation which culminates in the notion of “writing on **both** sides of the brain”, of harnessing spontaneity and intuition through the effective use of discipline - as Hooper (1992:14) states, “I believe **excellence** occurs when we do the right things right. Efficiency denotes left-brain activity, involving concrete sequential thinking, while effectiveness denotes right-brain activity involving creativity and vision”.

5 Research methods

The first method used in this study is a wide-ranging overview of literature on the nature of creativity with specific reference to the creation of fiction. Concepts derived from other disciplines, notably ideas centring on the functions of the **left brain** and the right brain and their interaction, will be explored. Notions about the genesis of an idea, what influences it, how the idea evolves, the planning and the actual writing of the story as discussed by a variety of authors will be reflected.

This is to be followed by a manuscript created by the author. The chosen genre is science fiction (the choice was made as a conscious effort at freeing the mind from mundane restrictions) - this is in line with Koestler's (1964:96) perspective that the creative act is "... an act of liberation". Intuitive and spontaneous creation will therefore be given unrestricted attention (in Klauser's terms, this is the Ariel phase). This part of the process will be accompanied by a diary chronicling subjective experiences in the context of the creative period.

The third aspect is the analysis of the manuscript (this is the Caliban phase, in Klauser's terms). The evaluative analysis will include two different responses - an analysis by the creator of the story as well as an analysis by an outside reader (the mentor, in Du Plessis' terms). This will be done according to language and style, the plot, characterization, dialogue, different perspectives and theme. This section will also include a reflection on the nature and extent of changes proposed by the two readers, and a rationale for the acceptance or rejection of suggested changes.

In the final instance an "improved" version of the manuscript will be produced - involving all the inputs from the critical reading and the diary (this is the Prospero phase, in Klauser's terms). This text will then be the version to be submitted to the publisher.

6 Chapter outline

The following is a tentative chapter outline:

Preface: Introduction and contextualization: An overview of literature dealing with the creative process in the writing of fiction

Chapter 1: Investigation of critics' views centring on the intuitive or right brain involvement in the creation of fiction (writing the story – first phase – Ariel speaks).

Chapter 2: Investigation of representative views on the critical or left brain involvement in the creation of fiction (critiquing the story – personal and external critique – Caliban speaks)

Chapter 3: Integration of processes – rationale – Prospero mediates.

Chapter 4: The final product reviewed: Recapitulation and recommendations

Chapter 5: Bibliography

Addenda proposed:

- A Brain works (a self-assessment test drawn from the Internet)
- B The diary
- C The first draft of the story
- D A refined draft of the story (a version as produced by the first reader)
- E A refined draft of the story (a version as produced by the external reader)
- F The final draft of the story