



James Anthony Mitchell, ca. 1955

CLOSE-UP:



Glimmer Train Close-ups are single-topic, e-doc publications specifically for writers, from the editors of *Glimmer Train Stories* and *Writers Ask*.

MYLA GOLDBERG, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

The story [Bee Season] is so much about language and words, the spelling of words, the words of Jewish mysticism. Once you become aware of this in the writing, do you find ways to explore opportunities in the language? How do you find new ways to play with language?

I'm naturally drawn to it. I love playing with language and words and images. So the opportunity to write about Jewish mysticism lent itself to what I already liked to do. It was born of my own proclivities and the subject matter that I was tackling. ■

ANTONYA NELSON, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

It's playful that you chose the name "Mabie" for that family. You write: "Winston Mabie wasn't going to belly flop on the landing strip... Winston Mabie would survive. Oh, maybe all of this was useful." You've used this kind of word play in several of your books, especially Nobody's Girl.



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I'm a huge fan of stand-up comedy. I'm not a huge fan of puns, but I do like things well put. Typically, I like a mix of diction in writing. That kind of success can be measured in a person's ability to persuade or entertain, to be able to go high and low in the same sentence or thought, and thereby to create some way of arresting the attention of the reader. When this is done, the reader is never sure what the next word will be.

I've read since I was young and have been captivated by the way things are expressed, almost to the exclusion of *what* is being expressed. The character Birdy in *Nobody's Girl* gave me material I could play with. She's often critical of how Mrs. Anthony writes, and because Birdy focuses on her grammar, Birdy is ignorant of what is being expressed. I can forgive meanness if the person being mean is also being funny. I can treasure the humor and forgive the meanness just to be entertained. I can see how people would criticize this trait in me; I criticize it in myself, via Birdy.

Does this phrasing come to you in a first draft, or is it something you work toward?

A lot of my editing occurs in the process of writing and constructing the sentence. My husband describes his writing process as constantly pursuing the story in the way that someone would chase a car, that is, without a lot of thought about how it looks, just running as fast as possible. I don't think about my writing that way. Things occur to me in word phrases. **In an emotional state, I almost always begin processing via words because that is my most fluent ability. I start processing almost all situations in terms of language.** That is my first editing job, and it happens internally. If something doesn't compel me by how it sounds, it is unlikely that it will make the page. This is not to say that images or the procession of events don't influence me, but I almost always start rewriting them to sound good to me. For me, the process of writing is an entertainment. I'm more entertained by interesting language than I am by an interesting story. I read aloud. I try to make my prose economical.

Yesterday, I was reading an article about a man who killed someone and was sentenced thirty years later because one cop pursued him. The writer quoted this Hell's Kitchen character who used the word *individual* in such a great, tough-guy, James Cagney sort of way: "He's an interesting individual." Using *individual* as a replacement for *guy* or *fellow* seems to me so terrific and funny that I made a note of it. I have a character in a story I'm working on now who is a construction worker. I have to make his way of speaking fun and not what the reader would expect. This is precisely the

kind of word I could insert that the reader wouldn't anticipate. The next time I get to that work, the character will use *individual* in connection with a caulk gun or something. In some way, he'll make an interesting shoving together of language. The writing I find the most tedious to read is the kind where the writer simply conveys information and makes no attempt to entertain or to be good at it. ■

EHUD HAVAZELET, interviewed by Eric Wasserman:

Your writing in general reads quite lyrically. I imagine that you would bring that same style to a longer work. Have songwriters been an influence to you? Your admiration for the Grateful Dead is no secret.

I used to play guitar for a long time and I wrote songs, and never got very good at it. Certainly in terms of whatever goes on in my head, music is very important, lyricists like Robert Hunter or Dylan. I can't say I ever consciously look to songs when I'm writing, but it's in my head. **I try to work the language, as I think any writer does.** ■

ELIZABETH McCracken, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

I think that if you scanned my novel, you would find that an amazing amount of it is in iambic pentameter. That's just a theory I have. I love language. It's something I have to be careful about because I can get indulgent and write four lines with heavy alliteration, though the narrator wouldn't talk that way. I get language drunk. **I adore those moments when a character says something that floors me.** ■



Photo: Tom Langdon

MYLA GOLDBERG, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

You've said that you like poets who write fiction because their language is so gorgeous. Do you read poetry as well? Which poets?

Embarrassingly I don't. I used to write it up through high school and into college. I didn't go out of my way to read new people, I read the canonical people you get taught in liberal-arts schools, like Sylvia Plath and William Carlos Williams. When I'm reading fiction I can tell if they write poetry too.

There's a sensitivity to language there that you don't often find in someone who isn't at least knowledgeable to some degree about poetry.

Who are some of the writers who you think embody this?

Michael Ondaatje is the prime example. His poetry infuses his fiction. He doesn't do so much with plot, but it doesn't matter because he does so much with language. ■

HA JIN, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

As a writer, I try to be lucid and transparent. V.S. Naipaul [*A House for Mr. Biswas*] is this type of writer. He aims for clarity in his prose. Writing this way is a conscious effort on my part. I think lucidity is a virtue. It doesn't mean you can't be subtle. Chinese people would say that my writing is too plain, that it's not literary enough. But this is the way I work. It doesn't mean that over time I won't develop. For me, the style of those early stories was right. ■

MATTHEW SHARPE, interviewed by Sherry Ellis:

In his Village Voice review of The Sleeping Father, Ed Park comments on the "aching absurdities, word salads, inspired semicolon deployment, golden-eared teenage monologues," that you utilize in this novel. To highlight a few of your inventive descriptions, Dr. Lisa Danmeyer "smelled of lilacs and competent sweat." "Chris and his mother's sex partner were walking through the woods" is another description. Can you describe how you get into a mind-set where you shut out the world and use language so creatively?

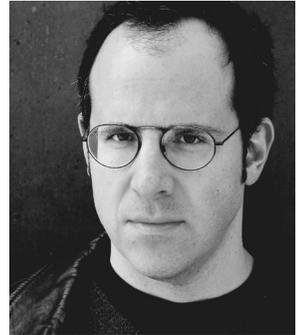


Photo: Jessica Raridon

I would say in some ways I shut out the world and in other ways I let the world enter. I mean, thank you for complimenting my linguistic prowess. I have to say that the review by Ed Park is about as good a review as an author can ever have hoped to get. If I die before I get another review like that I'll consider myself well reviewed in my life. I suppose I shut the world out in the sense that I'm not a person who, say, writes with music on. I know there are some people who write to music, who allow the music to infuse the work, but I need a quiet writing space, which is hard to come

by in New York City. In terms of letting the world in, I'm a real big fan of Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian theorist. His idea was that any way that speech gets used out there in the world can make its way into a novel, that novels are omnivores of all kinds of speech and writing. So I actually try to let the acoustical and rhetorical properties of all the other forms of language used in the world inform how I write. TV and radio, legal documents and bumper stickers, other people's novels, prayers and apologies, emails and letters, political speeches and medical jargon—I try to welcome them into my novels.

Your language in the short-story collection Stories from the Tube seems more simple. Do you believe the change in language from this story collection to The Sleeping Father has to do more with your evolution as a writer or the topic matter of the work?

It's funny about that. I always thought of myself as a Baroque, fancy, wordy kind of writer, a “putter-inner” as Stanley Elkin called it, instead of a “taker-outer.” So I think it must be the topic which dictated the simpler form of most of those stories in *Stories from the Tube*. Again I was dealing with TV as a discourse, and I suppose that the discourse of TV is fairly simple because they're trying to reach as large an audience as possible. But there are a couple of stories in there—“Doctor Mom” and “A Bird Accident”—that I think are probably closer in style to *Nothing Is Terrible* and *The Sleeping Father*. ■

MELANIE RAE THON,

interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

The sparse, cutting prose of First, Body and Sweet Hearts is different from your earlier work. Are these recent books conscious efforts to experiment with the boundaries of language?

I'm not interested in language simply for its own sake, but I'm interested in what language can evoke through the beauty of rhythm and tone. I don't think you can reach meaning without paying attention to sound. There is something that happens on a subconscious level with sound that can't be defined or explained by the meaning of the words that are being said. I'm interested in this subconscious force underneath language. ■

JOYCE THOMPSON:

I think we approach our work as writers for different reasons. Some people are called by the language, and then they have to learn to see the stories and find out what they mean and all those other things. Some people are called by story and then have to learn to love and use the language. When it's language that calls, it tends to be an early call. This is a gross generalization, but I think that people who are called earlier are called by language; people who are called later are usually called because of the stories they have to tell. ■

LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ, *interviewed by Nancy Middleton:*

You've noted minimalism as a trend that you're not all that crazy about.

It's true, I don't especially enjoy it. I go to reading for an experience of richness and intrigue and I don't find that in minimalism. Besides that, it's not fun to read. I don't mean that it's depressing; I rather like depressing books. By fun I mean that it doesn't give you the pleasures of reading, the sort of rich, panoramic sweep—the whole battery of what language can do. In many ways it is like an acrobat who jumps up and down, and that's the only trick he knows. Whereas a writer like Proust does every trick in the book. And that's what I enjoy.

I understand the aesthetic of minimalism: seeing how large an effect you can wring out of very small means. It might work in the hands of a very good writer like Raymond Carver, yes. But there aren't too many Raymond Carvers out there. Mostly what you get is small means and small effect.

I also think that there's something not true about it in that I don't perceive life as minimal. I think life is pretty terrible and difficult—I'm not an optimist—but it's also rich and full and soupy and frothing over with sometimes awful, sometimes beautiful things. There's a lot happening, and minimalism does not reflect that abundance. So when I read it I think, This is not the world I know. ■

RICHARD BAUSCH *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

The sentence is everything. I have such trouble getting students to understand that. If you can't make the sentence, forget it. Sometimes students

think they don't have to pay any attention to punctuation. I like to make a big fat sentence that's held together by a semicolon and make it hang there and support itself. I love to take a page of sentences and make them different, give them variety. I like to have a different kind of sentence in each paragraph. It's like writing music. You are going to do this in a minor key, but then this other thing is going to come in. It's all in there. If you can write a good sentence, then you can write another one, then another one.

I hate it when people say, "Well, in poetry, you have to pay attention to every word, and in short stories you have to pay attention to every sentence, and in novels, you can ramble." It's not true. A novel is written sentence by sentence, word by word, if you are any good at all. That's the fun of it. I couldn't do it any other way. I carve it out a little bit at a time. Some mornings I don't get any more than a page. Today I got about a page and a half. It's fine: a day's work. ■

ANNIE PROULX, *interviewed by Michael Upchurch:*

I use an old Webster's unabridged. I do collect dictionaries, and I do read them, and I do keep word lists, and I do make notes of language. I have big notebooks, page after page of words that I like or find interesting or crackly, or whatever. And from time to time I will also, if I feel a section is a bit limp, take a couple of days and just do dictionary work and recast the sentences so that they have more power because their words aren't overused. Often the search for the right word can consume a lot of time, but usually it can be found. I've put a lot of effort into finding the right word instead of using a scattershot approach.

The milk "firping" into the pail in Postcards? I assumed you were coining some of these, but no?

No. There are enough words there for me. There really are enough wonderful words to be used. Some of them are not used much, and they ought to be. ■

SIGRID NUNEZ, *interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:*

When you are teaching, are there particular qualities that you see in a student's writing that you get excited about?

Yes. Sensitivity to language.

Give me an example, if you could.

Most of the students don't write well yet, and it doesn't matter in the sense that you can write really terrible stuff at the age of nineteen or twenty or even twenty-eight and produce something divine in your forties. It is not necessarily a relationship between how you write when you're young and how you write later on. Because the students are so young and because they've never done this before, their ideas are often not that interesting. They're sentimental. They don't have much experience. They tend to see things in a certain way. They don't know how to develop a story. They tend to use stock characters in their stories.

So I don't expect from them wonderful characters, wonderful plot, or wonderful structure. That takes a long time. But if they have a sense of the language as a tool, that's everything. I don't care if they've given me a page that is just a description of a room as long as there's a rhythm to the sentences, and they know not to rely heavily on adverbs, and they know what a verb can do. That's what I mean by understanding language. Also, I think you can see in some of their work that they have no respect for the English language and no sense of it as a marvel. There's no beauty or mystery in it. But occasionally you see a student who—you see that when he was writing he was relishing the language and does recognize what its beauties are. Without that, it's just not possible to write. ■

ALBERTO RÍOS, *interviewed by Susan McInnis:*

We know how to use things and use them well. But we don't know what they are. My favorite example is the alphabet. We use it to form words. We write sentences and paragraphs, but we build them on a foundation that we truly don't understand. We don't know what the letter *A* is anymore. *A*, going back to the Greek, is alpha. We say it's the beginning of the alphabet. Or it's just the beginning. Or it's a sound. Or it's a symbol. But we don't know what it's the sound of, or symbol for. In fact, it comes from the Phoenician, maybe two thousand years ago when it was upside down, a V-shape that represented the horns of an ox. An ox, for the Phoenicians, was food, and that's the first letter: food. It's the first thing. It had meaning all by itself before there were other letters. As I read it, the crossbar on the *A* was a sign that the ox



was domesticated and yoked. My favorite is the letter Z. It's the sixth letter of the Greek alphabet, but it's our last letter. One of the first things you do when you conquer somebody is take away their language, because inherent in language is culture, everything about living. And when the Romans conquered the Greeks, they wanted them to become Roman, to live like them, to follow their laws. So they took their sound away. But when they used the Greeks as tutors, I can imagine the Greeks saying, "The only worthwhile literature is Greek literature. We'll teach your children, but we need our sound back to do it." And the Romans would have said, "All right, we'll let you have the letter Z—that sound—but, because it's Greek, it's going to the end of the bus, the end of the alphabet." Because it's Greek. To me that's a lesson. That's immediate. It's right in front of us. It's right there in the alphabet we use. And that's where, I think, the work of staying in place, staying with the alphabet until you understand what it is—before you start to use it—makes sense. And that "staying in place" is part of my job as a writer. ■

DAVID LONG:

To me, it's all about sentences. Good writing is good because it has good sentences, the way good movies are good because there's good cinematography, light through plastic. Now if there's no story there, that's not good, either. Because of this, I work slowly. I haven't produced a lot of work. So that's the negative side. On the other hand, I haven't had to look back on things I published years ago and say, Boy, was that stupid! I still feel pretty good about most of it. ■

JAYNE ANNE PHILLIPS, as interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

I started writing as a poet, so I've always written line by line, and with a real sense of the sound of a sentence and the rhythm of words against one another. My early sense of narrative had more to do with trying to get across perception itself rather than telling a conventional story. That very short form was a good way for me to intensify writing. They were narratives, but they moved out from an image and they worked very much according to language. I'm still a very language-oriented writer. ■

SIRI HUSTVEDT, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

Does using multiple languages allow you to see things in more than one way?

I think most bilingual people experience both double-ness and between-ness. With two languages, you never situate yourself quite as firmly inside the culture you are living in. I am American and I live in America, but I have a Norwegian mother and a father who grew up speaking Norwegian in America, and the presence of that other language in my life has had a powerful influence on me. When I'm in Norway, people can't hear that I'm not Norwegian, but it doesn't take long for them to realize that I'm outside the nuances of the culture.

In the end, the outsider view is a good one, however. It works against provincialism and against complacency. It can also give you a useful distance from language itself. People who are learning a language, for example, are able to see words as arbitrary objects. When you get to a certain stage of proficiency in a language, you see puns everywhere because you are still far enough away to notice those linguistic twins. People who live entirely in one language can become so buried in it that they lose that happy distance. ■

MARY MCGARRY MORRIS, interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:

Aubrey Wallace [in Vanished] is a distinctly disadvantaged person, essentially kindhearted, largely incapable of independent action, even at critical moments. It's interesting that one of his clearest, bravest moments involved expressing himself in writing. What effect does your writing have on you?

It was with a real sense of my own wonder that I wrote that scene when Aubrey realizes that, for the first time in his life, he has finally been able to express himself in writing. It was my way of honoring the story, for which I have great reverence. Aubrey thought that the letters were magic and the words had powers, and they do! They absolutely do. ■

CHANG-RAE LEE, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

This narrative touches on the themes of language and identity when young Hata first speaks with K in his native Korean. "I found myself listening to her closely, for it was some time since I had heard so much of the language, the steady, rolling tone of it like ours and not, theirs perhaps coming more

from the belly than the throat. It was almost pleasing to hear the words, in a normal register. But her talk was also not vulgar or harshly provincial sounding as was the other girls'; she was obviously educated, and quite well, and this compelled me even more, though it shouldn't have." He discovers her through speaking to her in Korean.

This is not a huge moment, but it's important. Her speaking the Korean language calls him out and reminds him about who he is. He's not this pure Japanese, and he can't have the same kind of detachment and detached view of her that other people at the camp can have. He knows his origins, and those origins still have a very visceral effect when he talks about her language and he hears it. There are things that we hear from our childhood—sometimes in different languages if we're immigrants—that are like powerful old songs. Hearing her speak Korean transports him and makes him a different person, and makes possible his connection with her. ■

JULIA ALVAREZ, *interviewed by Mike Chasar and Constance Pierce*

I think that in Spanish I'm a different person than I am in English. I understand myself differently, and I put the world together differently. I asked Marilyn Hacker, who lives part of the year in France and who writes while she's there, "Marilyn, how do you write in English hearing French all around you?" She said she has no problem with that at all; but her friends who have a native language that they don't write in, if they go to their native land and try to write in their adopted language, they find it hard, because they start to be absorbed in their mother tongue—back into a world they knew before they even started to write. And I find that happens to me in the Dominican Republic with Spanish. So I think that different selves get expressed in different languages. I think that because I understand something about the rhythms of Spanish, I can hear my Latino friends' Spanish in the way they write English. And one of the interesting things for me is what the rhythm of another language does to the English language: Southern writers and their sense of a sentence versus Heartland writers or a New York City writer. I hear different rhythms in their prose.



Photo: Bill Eichner

Sandra Cisneros said a similar thing about her voice in The House on Mango Street—that as much as people say it’s a child’s voice, it’s also an English-informed-by-Spanish voice. Is a similar thing going on in García Girls?

I don’t even hear it, because it’s like a native tongue becoming merged with my writing tongue. People who know me will say to me, “Boy, I can hear your voice in the prose, the way that you put a sentence together, the way that your voice goes up or the way that you move from one thing to another,” and I’m sure that’s because my Spanish is part of my rhythm in English and the way I speak. I like long sentences—once, a guy in a writers workshop asked if anybody had ever told me to write shorter sentences. I thought, Well, that’s probably part of my Spanish rhetoric taking off, all those Faulknerian sentences, all those embellishments and asides that don’t give you time to breathe.

Contemporary writers’ inclusion of Spanish with English can seem very in-your-face. It seems aggressive sometimes. And then at other times writers parenthetically translate the Spanish, as if to be helpful, or maybe in way of initiation. Or maybe they just want to be sure that they’re understood. These seem to be very different approaches.

And sometimes that, I think, annoys me—when I feel the heavy hand of the writer. So I think it’s such a balance, because you are writing in English. How do you keep a rhythm and a flow and at the same time introduce what, for us, is part of English while we’re talking, our little *ays* and *carambas* and *asabaches* and *Hoolias*?

You want to include the reader, so to do the right kind of balancing is important. I think it’s exciting.

I came to this country pre-bilingual education. English became the language that I learned things in. I was ten—that age when you start creating a sense of yourself and your understanding of the world—and it all happened to me in English. Plus, English gave me that necessary space to pull away from a way of thinking of myself, and of being, which didn’t credit my wanting to be a writer. English gave me a certain freedom, I’m sure. That was a part of it. Then all my training came in English—all my training, all my reading, everything—and that’s the language I learned to master. I feel like, in Spanish, I can’t reach the gas pedal and I can’t always work the steering wheel. I don’t have that sense that I can really fine tune what I’m saying. It’s much more what I call my childhood language. ■

ROY PARVIN, interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:

Your writing makes me think of a fruit, a fig, maybe, because it's very thick, very fibrous and snug. What do your stories feel like to you?

Well, they don't feel like figs particularly, but I can understand that. I always say that I want the words in the end to be etched. I want to have the sense that they're etched in metal. ■

I try to write sentence by sentence. And that might sound ridiculous because who doesn't? But I try to think about every sentence, the architecture of every sentence. I want to make it as spare as possible. To me it feels like a mixture of something that's very, very spare, and something that also is very lush.

HA JIN, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

Because I'm not a native speaker, there's a lot of flexible room for me to abuse the language, so I have to be very careful and accurate. There are both advantages and disadvantages to coming to writing in English so late. It's hard to write with the full weight of the language and with the natural spontaneity. The advantage is that I may write with a different kind of sensibility, and a slightly different kind of syntax, idiom, and style. ■

GEORGE MAKANA CLARK, interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:

You speak dozens of languages?!

Well, no, I shouldn't say that. The Romance languages: I mean, oftentimes you can speak Spanish in Italy and you can get a good set of directions and perhaps figure out the menu. I know some Xhosa, and a patois they speak in the South African Defense Force which is a mixture of Bantu words and English and Afrikaans. I know some Afrikaans, and English, of course. I also know some German, but I really want to learn a language the right way, using proper grammar. I don't want to speak like a four- or five-year-old. There are so many bits and pieces of language in my stories, but that's all you get because that's all I've got.

I grew up in a very chauvinistic, English-is-the-right-language way. I would get in trouble for speaking Xhosa, even sayings which would find their way into everyday life. Afrikaans was not spoken widely in Rhodesia because that's a South African language, but there were lots of South Africans in

Rhodesia, so certain words would come out in slang. I wasn't allowed to use them at all. It was considered an inferior language. I remember my mother would not let us use glottal stops.

Forbidden sounds!

Yes. My father grew up in London—my family left South Africa before moving back to Rhodesia—so he had the cockney accent where you kill the middle consonants of a lot of words. I wasn't allowed to do that. Contractions were somewhat suspect as well. We were supposed to speak proper English, really no other languages. It bothers me now because in later life, it becomes much more difficult to learn a language. ■

DANIEL MASON, interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:

You used a lot of Burmese words and phrases [in The Piano Tuner]. How did you decide when to use them?

Ah, that's a wonderful question. I usually kept words that have no English translation, or no good English translation. And so, for example, the women with the wood paste on their faces, *thanaka*. I could have explained it, but I wouldn't want to write that into the story.

Of course. I mean, how would you do that?

I would call it "the women whose faces were painted with sandalwood paste." That sounds terrible. So I said *thanaka*. Another instance would be when there's a job that's specific. At the beginning of the book I use the word *Bedin-saya*, which is the type of fortuneteller that they have there. The term *fortuneteller* here has a particular connotation. So I didn't want to use the word *fortuneteller*.

What type of fortuneteller is that?

They are very different, from the role they play in people's lives to their form of divination. They may divine by casting tea leaves. You may tell stories to them and they interpret them, looking at encounters with animals or other events for prophecies. My image of a fortuneteller in the U.S. is very different. Other times I chose to keep a word just because it sounds different. For example, now I am writing a book on Brazil, and I've decided on some of the Portuguese words I'm going to use. Part of it's set in an ecosystem called *caatinga* in Portuguese. *Caatinga* is what the word feels like: dry and scratchy and harsh, with spines on the plants. It's a very difficult

land. The word *caatinga* is so much more evocative than *scrub brush*. ■

EDWIDGE DANTICAT, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

You've said that in Haiti, "Everything is a story. Everything is a metaphor or a proverb."

Haitian Creole is full of so much nuance. Even a groan can be so monumental and have so many layers and meanings. People can say a lot with a proverb. There's always a turn around with a joke or with the stories. For example, Colin Powell goes to Haiti, and his name Powell is close to a Creole phrase, Pawèl, which means "don't see," so people call him Colin Pawèl because they don't think he sees or understands anything that's going on there. There are so many ways that the language can be maneuvered to be funny or sad, so that indeed there's a story in everything. ■

SIRI HUSTVEDT,
interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur
and Kevin Rabalais:

*There is an interesting word choice in the beginning of *The Blindfold*. The word is relieve: "It would relieve me enormously if you could keep books out of this for once." On the level of language, the weight of each word within your sentences is carefully chosen.*

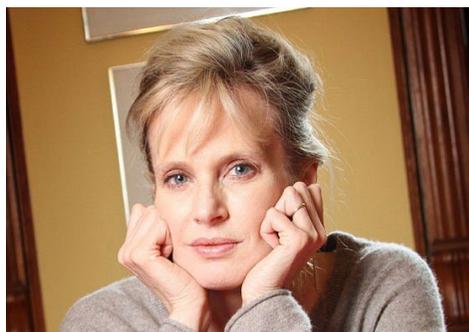


Photo: Dan Callister

When you live a life with books and stories and ideas, they never go away. Like the character, Mr. Morning, I often feel that there's a lot of chatter in my head—all those voices yelling for attention. You get filled up, loaded down. There's so much in there that you long for peace and emptiness. Iris hopes that Mr. Morning will relieve her by keeping books out of the discussion for a moment. Of course, he can't.

As for choosing words, a lot goes into making a sentence. There are writers who have great ears—Beckett, for example. His language is wonderfully musical. It has something to do with Irish English and its melodies. Part of being a writer is hearing the music in words while keeping an element of surprise in the language. Varying diction is one way to do this, dropping from high to low, borrowing from ordinary speech as well as elevated

language. At the same time, my idea—and it's not an idea shared by all the writers I admire, by any means—is that the prose should be so lucid that you're not looking at the sentences. I want the reader to look past the sentences and see the pictures that bring a story to life, that make it real. ■





CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

www.glimmertrain.org

ALVAREZ, Julia. Novels: *Return to Sender, Saving the World, In the Name of Salome, How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, ¡YO!, In the Time of the Butterflies*. Nonfiction: *Once Upon a Quinceañera, Something to Declare*. Poetry: *The Woman I Kept to Myself, Homecoming, The Other Side*. Middlebury College, Vermont. juliaalvarez.com

BAUSCH, Richard. Novels include *Hello to the Cannibals; Good Evening Mr. & Mrs. America, and All the Ships at Sea; Rebel Powers; Violence; and The Last Good Time*. Story collection: *The Selected Stories of Richard Bausch*. richardbausch.com

CHASAR, Mike. Interviewer. Poems in *Poetry, Alaska Quarterly Review, Antioch Review, Black Warrior Review*.

CLARK, George. Story collection: *The Small Bees' Honey*. Novels: *Raw Man, Harmony Church*. Numerous anthologies. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. [George Clark](http://GeorgeClark.com)

DANTICAT, Edwidge. Novels: *Breath, Eyes, Memory; The Farming of Bones; The Dew Breaker*. Story collection: *Krik? Krak!* Travel: *After the Dance*. Memoir: *Brother, I'm Dying*. Two novels for young people.

ELLIS, Sherry. Interviewer. Editor of the anthology *Write Now!* Interviews in *AGNI Online, Post Road, Writer's Chronicle*.

GOLDBERG, Myla. Novels: *The False Friend, Wickett's Remedy, Bee Season*. Essays: *Time's Magpie*. Stories in *Harper's, McSweeney's, failbetter*. mylagoldberg.com

HAVAZELET, Ehud. Novel: *Bearing the Body*. Story collections: *What Is It Then Between Us? and Like Never Before*. Oregon State University.

HUSTVEDT, Siri. Novels: *The Summer Without Men, The Sorrows of an American, What I Loved, The Blindfold, The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*. Essays: *A Plea for Eros, Mysteries of the Rectangle, Yonder*. Poetry collection: *Reading to You*. sirihustvidt.net

JIN, Ha. Novels: *War Trash, Waiting, The Crazed, In the Pond*. Story collections: *Under the Red Flag, Ocean of Words, The Bridegroom*. Three books of poetry. Boston University.

JOHNSON, Sarah Anne. Interviewer. Editor of *Conversations with American Women Writers and The Art of the Author Interview*. sarahannejohnson.com

LEE, Chang-rae. Novels: *The Surrendered, Native Speaker, A Gesture Life, Aloft*. Princeton University.

LEVASSEUR, Jennifer. Interviewer. Editor, with Kevin Rabalais, of *Novel Voices: 17 Award-Winning Novelists on How to Write, Edit, and Get Published*.

LONG, David. Novels: *The Inhabited World, The Falling Boy, The Daughters of Simon Lamoreaux*. Story collection: *Blue Spruce*. Nonfiction: *Dangerous Sentences*.

MASON, Daniel. Novels: *A Far Country, The Piano Tuner*. Also published in *Harper's*.

McCRACKEN, Elizabeth. Novels: *The Giant's House, Niagara Falls All Over Again*. Story collection: *Here's Your Hat, What's Your Hurry*. Memoir: *An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination*. elizabethmccracken.com

McINNIS, Susan. Interviewer. Center for Distance Education, Fairbanks, Alaska.

MIDDLETON, Nancy. Interviewer. Work in *South Carolina Review, Glimmer Train Stories, Belles Lettres*, and others.

MORRIS, Mary McGarry. Novels: *The Last Secret, The Lost Mother, A Hole in the Universe, Vanished, A Dangerous Woman, Songs in Ordinary Time, Fiona Range*. marymcgarrymorris.com

NELSON, Antonya. Novels: *Bound, Talking in Bed, Nobody's Girl, Living to Tell*. Story collections: *Nothing Right, Some Fun, Female Trouble, The Expendables, In the Land of Men, Family Terrorists*. University of Houston.

NUNEZ, Sigrid. Novels: *The Last of Her Kind, A Feather on the Breath of God, For Rouenna, Naked Sleeper, Mitz*.

PARVIN, Roy. Story collections: *The Loneliest Road in America, In the Snow Forest*. Nonfiction in *Northern Lights*.

PHILLIPS, Jayne Anne. Novels: *Quiet Dell, Lark & Termite, Shelter, MotherKind, Machine Dreams*. Story collections: *Fast Lanes, Black Tickets*. Work in *Granta, Harper's, DoubleTake, Norton Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. Brandeis University. jayneanephillips.com

PIERCE, Constance. Interviewer. Novel: *Hope Mills*. Story collection: *When Things Get Back to Normal*.

PROULX, Annie. Story collections: *Bad Dirt: Wyoming Stories 2, Close Range: Wyoming Stories, Heart Songs*. Novels: *That Old Ace in the Hole, Postcards, The Shipping News, Accordion Crimes*.

RABALAIS, Kevin. Interviewer. Editor, with Jennifer Levasseur, of *Novel Voices: 17 Award-Winning Novelists on How to Write, Edit, and Get Published*.

RÍOS, Alberto Story collections: *The Iguana Killer, The Curtain of Trees, Pig Cookies*. Memoir: *Capriatada*. Poetry collections include *The Dangerous Shirt, The Theater of Night*. Arizona State University.

SCHWARTZ, Lynne Sharon. Story collection: *Referred Pain*. Novels: *Disturbances in the Field, Leaving Brooklyn, Rough Strife, In the Family Way*. Nonfiction: *Ruined by Reading, Face to Face*. lynnesharonschwartz.com

SHARPE, Matthew. Novels: *You Were Wrong, Jamestown, Nothing Is Terrible, The Sleeping Father*. Story collection: *Stories from the Tube*. Wesleyan University. matthew-sharpe.net

THOMPSON, Joyce. Novels: *How to Greet Strangers, Bones, Merry-Go-Round, Conscience Place*. Story collection: *East Is West of Here*.

THON, Melanie Rae. Novels: *The Voice of the River*, *Sweet Hearts*, *Meteors in August*, *Iona Moon*. Story collection: *In This Light: New and Selected Stories*. University of Utah.

UPCHURCH, Michael. Interviewer. Novels: *Passive Intruder*, *The Flame Forest*. Book critic for *Seattle Times*.

WASSERMAN, Eric. Interviewer. Story collection: *The Temporary Life*. Chapbook: *Brothers*. ericwasserman.com

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