

The Sickness in Writing

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When Hemingway spoke the words, “Writers are alone,” what did he mean? Did he mean writers are alone in their thoughts or did he mean that in most cases writers are misunderstood? Or was this his isolationism speaking. Was he possibly depressed? What are the underlining factors for those writers whose work we consider great but who seemed to battle mental health concerns?

A writer with a mental illness like me can feel alone and misunderstood. Worse case scenario is that the writer is not taking the proper medication. Their writing becomes a handicap, causing them to feel as if they do not belong or as if there is a dark cloud overhead. Medication may not get rid of the entire cloud but perhaps make it becomes less dark.

I have been writing in a journal since the seventh grade. The journaling later inspired poetry and then short stories. Writing was a release for me, and I felt it came naturally. It was my way communicating because I was born with a speech impediment. I could not say “R” sounds. I had plenty of things to say but hardly said them out loud in fear of being tormented by the other kids. In fifth grade, an experience was monumental for me. That was where my speech therapist said in her words, “You will never talk like the other kids.” Forced into being an outsider I think that statement helped me prepare for schizophrenia.

How has schizophrenia changed my writing? Without medication, I would write pages and pages about things I thought were going on. I would write down the voices in my head. My words then only made sense to me. I obsessed over my writing. It was the only thing I wanted to do. I thought that I was changing the world with my so-called special powers. I was indeed a troubled mind.

I think about my own life and how my writing has changed as I have worked through my mental illness. I was depressed, maybe even suicidal. My writing was cynical and maybe seen as dark. A short story that I wrote might have the main character die. I thought that was the best way to end a story. Now, if I have a dark thought or

write something that is dark, I do not like the feeling inside. I take medication now and that has changed my outlook. Now, I hate killing a character. I often write about little kids—their innocence or their playful ways.

I definitely have a story to tell but I realize I will never be recognized as much as Hemingway and Dr Thompson. I will still write. Writing is breathing.

I often write about my theory about why I have this illness. I mentioned the speech impediment, which was probably a great stressor for me as a baby boy. In my early 20s, I thought that I was being stalked by an ex-girlfriend. I often thought that she followed me in her car, and I thought her friends spread rumors about me at my job and other places. I am told delusions do not get cured or are the hardest thing to cure. I still have that delusion. I stopped writing about it.

I was in the army, there were definitely stressors there. I was also in my early 20s. I had a bad bump to the head where I was knocked out for a second. I experienced hazing where 5 guys tried to duct tape me. I fought so hard 2 of them left to tape another guy. I fought off another 2; however, it took a man bigger and stronger than me to bring me down. Imagine fighting for your life and losing or having your own guys punish you for being the new guy.

I thought that the hazing split my world into 2 realities. There was the everyday reality, and there was an under the surface reality. In the under the surface reality, you would hear voices in your head and see the person in your head or so I thought. I thought in order for a person to do this, they would have to look me in the eye so I did my best to wear sunglasses as much as I could because the voices in my head and other people’s head could influence them. In other words, they could make a person do something they would not normally do.

Hemingway was alone possibly because of posttraumatic stress. He experienced war that changes everyone who experiences it. Thompson did a lot of drugs. Some would say because he thought that they were fun, and others maybe because he was lonely. It all sounds like debilitating depression. If anything these 2 great writers had

multi mental disorders. I personally would not change them, however.

Ernest Hemingway and Hunter S. Thompson both were famous writers who committed suicide. If they had experienced the breakthroughs in mental health today, I wonder if they would have written some of their greatest works. Hunter Thompson died a few years ago, and I feel sure he had enough money to afford help. However, if he had received help earlier in his life, would he have written his famous works such as *Rum Diary* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*?

Am I fortunate to read the great works that were written by a troubled mind or is it unfortunate? I feel blessed to have their writing as their epitaph. Their writing holds the key to how they might have thought even in a troubled

state of mind. But I will never be able to tell them that I have been there too. I know how they feel.

After the break up with the ex-girlfriend, I woke up one morning and my tail pipe was cutoff. I always thought it was her. Then again I did not live in the best neighborhood so who knows. I also thought a publisher was stealing my words. He had a disk of mine and I pretty much told him to give it back. I had a tire iron in my hand to threaten him. I would not do something like that now, but there are days where I feel that my words are all I have in this world rather they are read by others or not.

Many of the greats of literature as well as the other arts seem to be plagued with mental health disabilities. As a mental health consumer, I feel blessed to have read and benefited from their darkness.