

"I admire anybody who has the guts to write anything at all." —E. B. White

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QUARTERLY

Musing on: Character Development

by Donna Brauda

You, as the author must know your characters in order to create a three-dimensional world that your readers can be immersed into. A Character Outline Sketch can be a helpful tool to build your characters and make them real to your reader.

All fiction authors have various methods to develop characters in their creative writing. Some simply picture their characters in their head, some authors just write a brief paragraph about their main characters, but I develop a Character Outline Sketch which is a list of questions that I ask myself pertaining to each major character.

As an example, take someone you know and combine them with another person or entity. Think of say...Reggie the sales clerk you see every Saturday, now combine him with (in this case someone outlandish) say...Morris the cat. Create and expand on that. There is no right or wrong as long as the character fits into your story.

So, let's take Reggie with a feline sense, and make him the owner of a coffee shop. Then, just for fun—let's throw him into a role as a long lost son of Howard Hughes.

First, concentrate on Reggie, the Main Character (MC) of our story. Envision him and his role. Then, briefly jot down his character traits (keep in mind—this is for the author's eyes only). After creating the MC outline, complete outlines for each major character. Remember you must be flexible; let your characters tell the story. Delve deep into their personalities and show through action and story development their simplest foundations. Your characters will grow as your story evolves and your character outlines will help establish balance in your entire work.

On the next page you will find Reggie in our Coffee Shop scenario as an example.

Some Character Examples

Charles Dickens' **Ebenezer Scrooge**. Even Scrooge's name portrays his character. At first, as the reader, we meet a shell of a man. Self-incased in misery, bitterness and regret. As the story masterfully unfolds, Dickens introduces us to Ebenezer and his past, present and future. We find that he was once on the brink of having everything a man could hope for—right in his grip, and through greed and obsessions he chooses the lesser path. Yet in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens reveals in the end that there is hope for anyone.

Herman Melville's commander of the Pequod is largely remembered by the interaction between his crew and *Moby Dick*, the Great White Whale. Melville used his own experiences at sea to form this great work and the unforgettable one-legged **Captain Ahab**.

King Arthur and His Knights by Sir James Knowles was based on *Le Morte d'Arthur* (*The Death of Arthur*) by Sir Thomas Malory. The legend of **King Arthur, Merlin, Guinevere** and **Lancelot** has lived on since 1470 and many works have been derived from it. Even in modern times JFK's life is compared with Arthur and Camelot, mirroring the President's life with that of a good King.

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* brings out the kid in us all. **Tom Sawyer** is memorable for many reasons and we can relate to some of the things he does. Who wasn't at least a little naughty in our younger years? Twain combines Tom's experiences and his interactions to create a character that we can identify with.

The Writers Studio
South Boston, VA

Director:
Curtis Brauda
(Gene Curtis)

Assistant Director:
Donna Brauda
(D. S. Curtis)

Website:
<http://members.geronline.com/writersstudio/>

inkwrit@yahoo.com

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Character Outline Sketch:

- Character Name: Main Character, Reggie Morris (name may change later)
- Male/Female: Male
- Age: 30 some
- Birth date: --
- Other: Black hair, gray eyes, 5 ‘ 11” tall
- City of Residence: South Boston, VA
- Apartment/House: Apartment
- What type of Car do they drive—if any? Prefers walking
- Education: Highly educated
- Military: None
- Occupation: owns, manages The Coffee House and is its espresso clerk
- Unique in any way? Has a cat sense (always lands on his feet)
- Happy or sad childhood: happy and lucky
- Hygiene: very clean
- Attitude or Point of view: enjoys life, has fun, takes risks
- What is your character’s deepest fear? Drowning
- Body expression or style: no tattoos or piercings
- Superstitions:
- Annoying Trait/s. Always cleaning
- Addictions: caffeine
- Prejudices. Doesn’t like dogs.
- Quirks: Is always smoothing his hair. Also loves the sandy beaches but hates the water.
- Habits, good and bad: very clean, but can be excessively clean.
- Moral Stands. He is a good man and a good listener, evaluating what is the best course for whoever seeks advice.
- Hobbies: tennis and volleyball
- Extroverted or Introverted: generally introverted, but he chooses certain people to open up with.
- Intuitive or analytical: intuitive.
- Aggressive or Passive. Passive, but finds ways to get things done.
- Other:
- What is your character’s biggest secret? He secretly gives money and other assistance to those who show a true need.
- How does your character deal with stress? Sulks, deep in thought and takes little cat-naps.

Interaction with other characters:

- Does this character fulfill inner need (MC may not be aware of it at beginning of story.)? N/A
- Who is the most important character/s in this character’s life? Reggie mentors a college professor: Prof. Gaillen.
- What is the worst thing that can happen to this character? To be set adrift all alone on the ocean without a life preserver.
- What is the best thing that could happen to this character? Helping others. A plan to help some –that will entice other to do the same—starting a snowball effect to fill the needs of many. A Legacy from his father.
- What makes this character an important part to the story? His is the MC.
- Rival to which character/s: The large espresso company moving into town-that thinks more about money than people.
- Similarities or Differences that pull characters together or push apart. Reggie’s Coffee Shop is down home country goodness, and Large Espresso Company is flashy and shiny, but product quality is lacking in many ways.
- MC’s Side Story: During this time, Reggie is competing in Halifax County. Tennis Tournament.
- Other:

Character relationship to the MC:

- Best Friend: Jim _____ (from college days)
- Worst Enemy: Espresso Company’s Manager _____
- Father and Mother: Howard Hughes and Sally _____ (names may be changed later)
- Spouse:
- Sister or Brother:
- Daughter or Son:
- Employee to: N/A
- Owns a Business? Espresso Coffee Shop
- Animals or Pets: Cat: Rusty
- What makes MC special to them? N/A

According to Aristotle

You should start every story with a question. When that question is answered, your story is over.

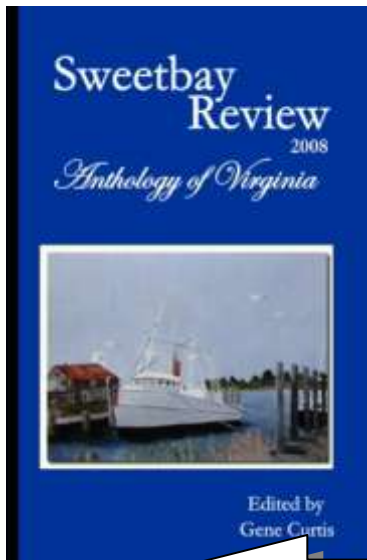
So, we have a silly but good basis for a story.

Goal of the MC and the story:

- **Beginning and set-up:** A new Espresso Coffee Shop opens with Reggie, a mysterious manager.
- **Middle or conflict:** Another espresso store comes to town and tries to take over Reggie's store and an entire block of family-owned stores—condemning business and practically stealing them away from their owners.
- **End and Conclusion:** Reggie—through his knowledge and good hearted actions saves his store and the whole town and teaches the manager of the rival espresso company that there is more than “The Bottom Line.”

Now, check over all your Character Outline Sketches (the characters that move your story), but keep in mind that the MC's actions drive the story to the end. There are minor characters that will have very few comments. Beware—Sometimes the Muse twists the story, where the MC isn't the MC at all.

So, grab your pencil or use a computer (with that convenient back space button). Continue to tweak your Character Outline Sketches until you know your characters and their roles in your story— now, let your story tell itself.



To Beat The Block

by Krisa Vrauda

The cursor mocks,
A writer's woes
And gnarled blocks.
Just blinking on the screen.
Demanding a thought of mine.
To wrestle words to mean.
Do you think it is so simple,
You nagging little dot?
If it were easy,
I could write alot.

I'd weave a tale
With deftness
And with charm.
A trail of dreams
A chain of plot
Instead of letting you sit there
Tapping 'til I rot.

Or perhaps a play
To wit
Too sharp
A cruel satire
To sing another's flaws.
Yet to draw such blood,
I must first evade Your claws.

Alas, my fate is simple,
Creativity's bubble bursts.
Like a pimple.
And spews such noxious nectar
Bad rhyme, no meter
A poem all critics Hector.

And yet I've fooled you
My nemesis, my cursor.
You are on the bottom of the screen.
And I need go no further.

2009 *Sweetbay Bay Review* Submissions
Send to: Gene Curtis inkwrit@yahoo.com
Submission deadline is September 1, 2009
For more information go to:
<http://members.gcronline.com/writersstudio/Anthology.htm>

Writing That Makes You Want to Flarf

by Tammy Tillotson

As writers, many times we are tempted to ball up our chicken scratch and start over. We may feel our infamous pieces of “trash,” our apparently hopeless efforts, are of much greater service deposited into the farthest most crevice of the trash bin, if not the paper shredder, which dissects our fodder while effectively deterring any frail attempt to rescue it or piece it back together.

At one time or another, most writers have all probably done this. Many writers have also raced back to that trash bin, in a midnight madness moment of clarity and inspiration, and frantically tried to tape or glue back together the tiny shreds of scattered dignity only to find this reassembly as daunting a task as finding the actual million dollars in a souvenir bag of mutilated currency courtesy of the U.S. mint. Yet, perhaps we should not be so easily discouraged. It seems there may indeed be a home for writing that makes you want to flarf.

Flarf is a somewhat controversial type of poetry movement that is less than a decade old. Much of it started as sort of a fun prank by a group of poets. In 2000, Gary Sullivan, who is an experimental poet and given credit for coining the term flarf, submitted what he thought was the worst poem imaginable to the International Library of Poetry. Notoriously regarded as a vanity publisher, Sullivan meant this as a joke and just wanted to see what might happen. The ILP’s response was a warm congratulations and notification that the poem would appear in a nice coffee-table quality anthology for only \$49.95 and \$8.00 postage and handling!

Since vanity publishers seek to take advantage of amateur writers, Sullivan and a group of his poet friends started having fun with submitting their personal worst to such publishers. However, what may have started as a bit of a spoof has steadily gained popularity and added to the discussion as to what really constitutes “good” and “bad” art in regards to poetry.

Some flarf is written using various arrangements of Google search terms and sort of a copy and paste method to rearrange or juxtapose the terms so it reads and appears to be more poem-like on a page. Other flarf reflects sarcasm, cynicism, or a great deal of irony, though it might also strive to present a new or different take on what constitutes reality or a particular perspective on a certain topic. In short, flarf is not always fluff or fancy stuff, and it does not have to adhere to

some complex metrical schematic, but it does have a point and is intentionally written.

For those who may be tempted to write-off flarf as silly or unprofessional, as its popularity continues to increase, more venues and competitions are aiming to acknowledge and reward flarf poets. The presence of flarf is expanding both online and in print media. This fall Rod Smith’s Edge Books, an independent publisher in Washington, D.C., is slated to release a 400 page anthology entirely of Flarf which will feature works by numerous poets including Gary Sullivan, Nada Gardener, Sharon Mesmer, and other poets known for their works within this movement.

Also in 2009, WinningWriters.com paid out close to \$3600 in cash prizes in their annual Wergle Flomp Poetry Contest which awards winning flarf poems. Flarf efforts for Flomp (try saying that fast 10 times) were submitted by over 800 contestants to this annual competition. A careful reading of the winners, honorable mentions, and finalists show that flarf really can reflect a great deal of ingenuity, originality, and intellectualism. Though flarf may sound funny to say, it may not be something to dismiss so light handedly.

Though, I dare admit writing flarf can also be a bit of luck and a very timely muse. Last year, after having spent nearly an entire spring day perusing a stack of books about Publishing On Demand, or POD, I ended the day with a short devotional, as I tend to do. When I read the short scripture verse, “Save me, O GOD!” from Psalm 69, I laughed aloud. Glancing at the half-read stack of POD books I had just neatly shoved aside, I happened to think, “Save me, O POD!” On sheer whim, I read the rest of the Psalm and more and more similarities just sort of starting jumping out at me, so quickly that I had to write them all down. This was really just an amusing way for me to sort of “clear the air” at the end of an information overload day. I also feel God was humoring me in the process for if it hadn’t been for that key verse of inspiration, I would have never come up with the poem on my own. At the time, if anyone had tried to tell me that any poetry venue would have awarded this effort, not to mention pay me for it, I would have laughed. Though now I might say, “That’s such a load of flarf! Have you thought about submitting it to...”

Additional Resources and Articles on Flarf

[Original "Mm-Hmm" Flarf poem by Gary Sullivan and an essay on Sought Poems by K. Silem Mohammad in PDF form](#)

[Flarf: From Glory Days to Glory Hole](#) by Gary Sullivan

[Wergle Flomp Poetry Writing Contest Flarf poetry: From the outhouse to the art house](#)

[Can Flarf Ever Be Taken Seriously?](#) by Shell Fischer, Poets & Writers

[Flarf and Conceptual Writing in Poetry Magazine](#) by Kenneth Goldsmith

[The Flarf Files](#)

[Possum Ego – "Con Po"](#) blogpost discussion on Flarfists and Conceptual Poets

[Virgin Formica](#) – Sharon Mesmer's blog

Additional Note: The International Library of Poetry changed its name in 2004 to Poetry.com though it was still regarded as a vanity publisher. However, earlier in 2009 the domain name Poetry.com, was purchased by Lulu which plans to revamp it in its entirety. In an April 15, 2009 community forum blogpost on Lulu, Social Networking Team Lead Nick Popio posted the following message: **"...Yes, Lulu did by the domain name, poetry.com, but not the business behind it. We are trying take a site with an admittedly unsavory reputation and change it for the better by removing the toxic elements and focusing on building a community for poets. What you see now is just the first version of Lulu Poetry, and we will continue to add features and improve the site. We hope to build a real community for poets that will have the resources they need to become successful and have a great time doing it..."**

2010 *Bull Bay Review* Submissions
 Send to: Tammy Tillotson bullbayreview@yahoo.com.
 Submission deadline is January 15, 2010.
 For more information go to:
<http://members.gcronline.com/writersstudio/Bullbay.htm>

SPOETRY In-Box

by Tammy Tillotson

\$5,000 sent today.
 Want College Financial Aide?
 I am a certified loan lender here in the United States.
 Need more fun and pleasure?
 You have won!
CONGRATULATION YOU WON
 Make sure you don't disappoint.
 High End and High Quality -
 Knock Off!



Lines

photo by
 Tammy Tillotson

