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Other People's Countries

Reflexive Essay

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Introduction

I have always told stories. I have written fiction, as well as for theatre and television. *Other People's Countries* is the work that has taught me the most about writing. In writing it I found a way back to a creative freedom I thought I had lost. It has taken me further than I have ever gone before in terms of process. I have also realised that I still have a long way to go. I am only at the end of my beginning.

I wrote my first play in 1993 called *Wild Throat*. It dealt with the fantasies of a repressed young woman trying to find herself. It was a two-hander and we used music that I wrote the lyrics for too. It was a collaborative effort in that we work-shopped the scenes but I wrote the structure and the overall piece. It was received with critical acclaim and like most plays, made no money. I was a trained actress but I didn't enjoy the actual performance experience. I preferred the collaborative process of creating drama. It felt natural to me to create story through dramatically realised human relationships.

I left soon after and went travelling for two years. When I arrived back South Africa was in the swing of everything shiny and new. I saw some of the most challenging and exciting theatre and television work I'd ever seen. It made me want to work in television.

I started my career in South African television in 2000. I worked on *Isidingo* for eight years. Then there were a lot of similarities to working in theatre. It was a collaborative process. However there was a lot more structure to the process. I trained as a story liner, a scriptwriter and a script editor. Each part of the process had input from at least three or four various stakeholders. As a storyliner I constantly had to mould my story and find ways to streamline it to appease all those voices. Fundamentally however, I was encouraged to create challenging and inventive stories that explored our emerging socio-political world.

Slowly, however, as some of the stories proved too challenging for the audience the SABC changed the mandate of the show. It was to become less reflective, more aspirational. Less interrogative of current society and more celebratory of where we

had come from and how we had overcome as a nation. This kind of storytelling became known as nation building.

There is a place for nation building, certainly. There were the difficult and controversial aspects to re-creating the South African experience on screen. Such as white writers creating black worlds. There needed to be a balance of my own inbuilt prejudice and my constant need to expand the limits of experiential understanding. I needed to do this in ways that were honest and not patronising. I felt like I was creating stories very far outside my own immediate experiences. I embraced this; it felt like a re-education of what my country was.

But as the mandates became more restrictive, I felt like I was dying a slow and creative death.

The below extract is taken from the *SABC's Mandate – powers, functions, rights and obligations.*

CORE EDITORIAL VALUES OF THE SABC

Public broadcasters worldwide share many features relating to independence, accountability and diversity. However, the SABC's context has unique facets that also determine its positioning. These relate to South Africa's challenges as a young democracy and a society in transition. The challenges are captured neatly in the preamble to the Constitution, which sets out the objectives of the South African constitution as these:

To heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.

To lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by the law.

To improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person.

To build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

Those national objectives therefore underpin the values and principles that define the SABC's role as a public broadcaster: to play a part in healing divisions of the past; to promote respect for democratic values and human rights; to supply information that allows citizens to exercise their rights, and to reflect the rich diversity of a united South Africa. [http://vcmstatic.sabc.co.za]

These are admirable aspirations. Unfortunately they resulted in people enacting the narrowest possible interpretation of them. By 2010 I found myself in a working environment where I could only use the most basic of soap tropes. I couldn't even explore the negative sides of aspiration through transactional sex – which is a South African reality.

By the time I'd decided to apply to do an MA I felt stifled and oppressed by soap tropes, I knew I needed to do something drastic in order to find a deep-seated and fundamental change.

I'd always loved novels and had attempted to write two before I went back to reading novels as opposed to consuming film and television. What is so evocative about the form is that it can be non linear, and it is one person's vision. I was inspired by novels such as *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje, *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Clos*e by Jonathan Saffron Foer.

I have written a previous novel. It is called *The Shooting Picture*. It is set in the coloured townships of Johannesburg. It deals with a boy who draws a picture of a murder and his teacher who realises that it means something. She embarks on a relationship with the boy's father who is a prominent gang member in Coronationville. I was invited to an MA reading in 2010 by a fellow student. At that reading, a woman on the MA course read an extract from her novel. It had such extraordinary similarities to my book that it rendered me immobile.

That was because the writer is coloured, and I am white. I felt like I could not feasibly write about a coloured experience. I understand and to a certain extent agree with the

sentiment that one should feel able to write about anyone. However, this is South Africa and I am a white South African. That comes with a certain kind of baggage. That baggage includes having the necessary sensitivity and understanding that your actions will always be interpreted in the light of who you are and where you've come from. I grew up as a child of the oppressor. That philosophy has been deeply ingrained in me. It is my job to overcome it.

Murakami's description of himself resonates nicely with me:

'… clouds are always taciturn. I probably shouldn't be looking up at them. What I should be doing is looking at inside of *me*. Like staring down into a deep well. … I've carried this character around like an old suitcase, down a long, dusty path. I'm not carrying it because I like it. The contents are too heavy, and it looks crummy, fraying in spots. I've carried it with me because there was nothing else I was supposed to carry…. I'm still lugging around that old suitcase, most likely heading towards another anticlimax. Towards a taciturn, unadorned maturity – or, to put it more modestly, toward an evolving dead end.' [Murakami, 2009: p 150-151]

My relationship with oppression forms a huge part of my suitcase. I have read far too many stories about white people who grew up not knowing where they were and what they were doing. There is a self-pitying resonance to this narrative, and I certainly did not want to write that trope either. I was at a standstill creatively. I did not know what I wanted to write. I felt that because I'd consistently written inauthentic stories that were less about people's journeys and more about selling an ideal of how to be, I'd fundamentally lost my way.

And so, I arrived at the MA course, with no idea of what I was going to write, what I wanted to say, and how I was going to say it. I wanted it to be this way. I wanted to embark on telling a story from a point of absolute nothingness. I also wanted to work in fiction as opposed to a screenplay format, which is one I know very well, and one that I can easily hide within. I didn't want to use cards, or write a treatment and decide what the ending of my story would be before I knew what the middle was. I wanted to write to find meaning. I wanted to write to ask questions, I wanted to write to find my way in to an understanding of fundamental truths.

I listened to a British screenwriter give a lecture. Abi Morgan wrote the screenplay for *Shame*, which I think is extraordinary. Here is an extract from her lecture which is pertinent to my approach:

'I know one thing, that I know nothing – Socrates. I like this phrase. When I first heard it, it stuck with me. There is an expectation when asked to give a lecture that one will impart some wisdom. So the wisdom is this: I know one thing, that I know nothing. As a writer I find this the only way to be. Whenever I start a project it is rarely the facts that have interested me, the stuff one knows about a character, a person, a situation, a story… I often start a script still not knowing. For me this is often the best way to be. It is the carrot, this state. The desire to find something, when one is often grappling around in the dark. And it can come in many different ways and at many different times. Sometimes you get a hint of it in the research, a sense of what it might be … I try to find something, something that intrigues me, haunts me, a piece of the puzzle that I don't know quite where it fits but know it may prove to be the most important and vital piece … This chink of light that I try to find, that I mentally stick on my laptop, it is my running partner, my torch in the dark. Often it will be at the core of what my screenplay will be about. It is the start of gaining knowledge, of knowing something, however brief, and affirms to me that out of nothing, there is always something.' [http://guru.bafta.org/abi-morgan-screenwriters-lecture]

This lecture clarified what I was instinctively trying to do. Which is to start writing a story without knowing where I'm going to finish. I wanted to find a way to trust in my intuitive decisions as opposed to writing to a story formula. It gave me courage to begin and strength to continue. I wanted to use the novel form to break out of the prison that screenwriting had become, both on a technical as well as philosophical level.

Historical Fiction/Spy Genre Fiction

I decided to choose a genre. In the lead up to deciding what I wanted to write, I read a lot of young adult fiction as well as speculative fiction. I was drawn to speculative fiction because of the world building aspects, an entirely new world needs to be created. As a writer it is a constantly explorative process. Nothing in the world is known. This chimed with my need to be open and explorative and not deal with anything intimately known to me. I'd read Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* and Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. But

then I read *Blackout and All Clear* by Connie Willis, which is set in 2060 and deals with time travelling historians who travel back to various locations in Britain during the Second World War.

I decided that historical fiction is also about world building. It felt like the best of both worlds. I get to create a world I know nothing about, but there are parameters that I needed to take cognisance of. The Second World War is my favourite period of history. I watched a lot of war films, *Casablanca* being one. As a child, there was a glamour about it. However, I am not an expert in the 1940's. What I particularly like about setting a story in a war is that the political landscape so directly impacts on the personal. War is flux, in which anything is possible. Where norms are broken and new ways of being are formed. In war, we find ourselves moving from one heightened moment to the next.

'For the common soldier, at least, war has the feel - the spiritual texture - of a great ghostly fog, thick and permanent. There is no clarity. Everything swirls. The old rules are no longer binding, the old truths no longer true. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, hate into love, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery. The vapors suck you in. You can't tell where you are, or why you're there, and the only certainty is absolute ambiguity. In war you lose your sense of the definite, hence your sense of truth itself, and therefore it's safe to say that in a true war story nothing is absolutely true.' [Tim O' Brien, 1990, p 84 - 91]

War makes us carry everything we have been to the surface, and that informs everything we will immediately choose to do. We know the past is dead because war has destroyed it, and yet we do not know what the future is. War becomes an inconsistent and unyielding present.

'To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. Though it's odd, you're never more alive than when you're almost dead. You recognize what's valuable. Freshly, as if for the first time, you love what's best in yourself and in the world, all that might be lost. At the hour of dusk you sit at your foxhole and look out on a wide river turning pinkish red, and at the mountains beyond, and although in the morning you must cross the river and go into the mountains and do terrible things and maybe die, even so, you find yourself studying the fine colors on the river, you feel wonder and awe at the setting of the sun, and you

are filled with a hard, aching love for how the world could be and always should be, but now is not.' [Tim O' Brien, 1990, p 84 - 91]

The English Patient by Michael Ondaatjie is a source of inspiration. Although it was not my intention ever to write anything as complex and poetic - I just do not have that level of ability - for me this was a benchmark novel in terms of its themes. Ondaatje's exploration of characters who live and work in other people's countries resonated deeply. His blurring of personal and geographical boundaries, for example by pitting love against ideology, I found moving and extraordinary.

I also read the *God of Small Things* by Arundhuti Roy. What I found fascinating about her novel is how she places the internal lives of her characters against a larger political landscape, and how these personalities battle instinctively against the rigidity of social laws and taboos.

Finally, from a philosophical perspective, the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman summed up what I wanted to explore in terms of fanaticism:

'I am increasingly convinced that the need to be right has nothing whatsoever to do with the love of truth, but to face the implications of this means accepting a painful inner emptiness; I am not now what I sense somehow I am meant to be. I do not know what I feel from the bottom of my heart, I need to know. The beginning of wisdom is not to flee from this condition or distract yourself from it. It is essential not to fill it up with answers that have not been earned. It is important to learn how to wait with that emptiness. It is the desire to fill up that emptiness which leads to political or religious fanaticism.' [http://guru.bafta.org/charlie-kaufman-screenwriters-lecture]

In war, there is the notion that one is being forced to consistently live in the present. This can either open us up to that inner emptiness or it can force us to make things up in order to fill the void. So, Balthazar arguably has embraced fanaticism to fill his void. Janis embraces the ideology of the SOE in order to fill hers.

My choice to set my novel during 1942 and make it a spy genre novel was less about wanting to ask pertinent historical questions and more about exploring a combination of political ideology and grief. War is about the salutation as well as the death of dreams. Max Skinner lives in a world of secrecy but his search for honesty is what could destroy

him. Janis Morgan is a witness to oppression and dysfunction. She captures and transforms it into art. But how does she actually live with herself? Johanna is the child of a cult. Can she ever leave it, or will it destroy her?

I based Janis on the photographer, Constance Stuart Larrabee. She was born to British parents, and studied all the latest techniques in photography in London, before setting up a portraiture studio at the age of 21 in Pretoria in 1941. Although she earned her primary living as a portraiture artist, she is renowned for her startling and evocative images of the peoples of Johannesburg. Larrabee also became a war correspondent and covered the war in North Africa.

What interested me about her photographs is how unusual they were in exploring power dynamics between white and black people. I am also interested in the notion of how artists generally, are witnesses to the human condition.

Through the journeys of the various characters, I want to explore the tension between the personal and the political/historical. It is my sense that South Africans today are overshadowed by their history, trapped within it and are continually fighting to break free. However, the psychological mechanisms used to escape the past are not an inward interrogation of any given individual's culpability, but rather an external projection of blame.

By exploring the historical period when this overbearing shadow developed, namely the post Boer war period, I want to explore how political beliefs do not facilitate personal culpability, and blind obedience to them make people behave in ways that are internally destructive to themselves, whether they are aware of this or not: in this country, personal choice always seems to be either a reflection of a socio-political law or an act of rebellion against it.

Process

Once I'd decided to set my novel in 1942 in North Africa and then move my characters to Johannesburg I researched those specific periods. I have been to the Middle East, and have always loved Egypt. My uncle lived in Egypt for thirteen years and my grandfather fought in the North Africa war. During the course of my research, I discovered that my Afrikaans grandfather had been a member of the Ossewa Brandwag. However, when he

realised he faced interment he resigned and signed up for the war effort. He too was dispatched to North Africa.

My great-aunt was a code breaker at the Telecommunications Centre in Egypt and a lot of the anecdotal information in my early chapters comes from conversations with her. My grandmother spoke to me at length about life in Cairo. My grandparents painted an elegant picture of colonial life. Yet the undertow of what was happening with Anwar Sadat for example barely featured in their descriptions or understanding of what it meant to live in Cairo. Like me, they too were people who'd spent their lives living in other people's countries and never really examined what it meant to either themselves or the native inhabitants.

I first researched life in Cairo and then more specifically the fall of Tobruk. It is quite something to research a war. As I began to investigate it I realised how difficult it was to fight a war in a desert, and how easily your opponents can see you. There is a huge amount of documented information on the fall of Tobruk. I found myself overwhelmed by it. It took me ages to separate what I needed to do, namely, explore Janis as a woman in the desert, and then create a journey of war within her context that was rich and alive as opposed to dry and factual.

I wanted to do the research first and then create the story chapter by chapter. I felt that I would glean incident and event from research that would resonate more strongly than if I'd just created scenarios from scratch. Descriptions of people and places were like shards of meaning for me. Zofia and Hangover house was one. Dr. Xuma being a doctor in Johannesburg was another. My father-in-law told me about his father who was a carpenter who was one of the men who made fake tanks to scatter in the desert to trick Rommel. All these nuances fascinated me and I wove them into my narrative.

The parallels between Colonialism and Afrikaner ideology are startling. They seemed to me to have been built on delusion. Both had false histories. Eugenics is a false science and colonialism was a fake reality. It felt as though war smashed all these falsehoods and got close to creating a fragile reality amid the chaos and mayhem. I wanted in some way to capture this period in Johannesburg.

The 1940's just before the Nationalist Party came to power, was experiencing economic expansion and a melting pot of political thinking in Johannesburg; Communism was becoming popular, The ANC was growing in status and power. The centenary celebrations of the Great Trek had given rise to the formation of the Ossewa Brandwag, which started as a cultural organisation and then grew into an organised political voice of more the 350 000 members. [i]

Few people are aware that the organisational as well as experimental methodologies perfected in the Death Camps of Nazi Germany were in fact initiated in German South-West Africa. Heinrich Ernst Goering [father of Hitler's deputy Herman Goering] was the Governor of South-West Africa at the time and sanctioned the massacre of more than 80,000 Herero's who rebelled against their German overlords in 1904. A bloody battle ensued and the remaining 17,000 Herero's were incarcerated in what was to become the prototype for the Nazi concentration camps. It is these camps which were inspired by the theories of Eugenics. [ii]

I wanted to use the Herero Massacre as quite a big story turning point, as it is viewed by some an act of genocide[iii] that can be attributed to the 'madness of Nazi theory' but it can also be seen as a colonial act and is a trigger for Janis to ask more challenging questions of herself and her belief structure.

The pseudo-scientific theory of "eugenics" (relating to or producing improved offspring) proposed that "races" were in a struggle for survival of the fittest. German Scientists distorted the concepts outlined by Darwin, such as 'the survival of the fittest' and argued that innate racial inequalities gave each individual life a different value, and extermination of "inferior" races was not only appropriate but unavoidable.[iv]

I wanted to play with the notion of 'eugenics' as some kind of link between the fanaticism of the Ossewa Brandwag and the colonial thinking of the time.

First Responses

The first responses to my chapters were intense learning curves. People responded well

to the story and to the characters. But they also felt that my rendition of the story was trite at times, and superficial. They were concerned about Janis and Max's relationship, it felt like a Mills and Boon, said a lecturer. Horrifying words! These initial responses made me realize my worst fears could be true. I had become mired in soap tropes and I would never be able to get beyond them. I panicked. I didn't know how to move forward. I was in a class with some exceptionally bright and talented young writers, who had come out of the Honours course and were well versed academically. It made me feel isolated and insecure.

In that darkness after my first responses I reached out deep inside … and found nothing. No words of wisdom, no sense that I could do this, no rational thought. I was literally in an absolute wilderness. I finally realised I could stop, throw in the towel or I could keep going, by simply putting one foot in front of the other. And that is what I did.

Slowly, I made progress. I was battling with a lot. Researching history is one thing, but the application of it with verisimilitude is a challenge. A spy novel generally needs sophisticated plot. I don't think my plotting was nearly refined enough. Then there was the issue of how to deal with the themes without banging readers over the head. And finally, the most challenging thing of all for me, the constant demand for more interiority of character. I knew why the people in my class asked for this. I knew too that they were right. What I did not know was how to achieve it on a technical level. Like most huge learning curves, I did nothing but jump up and down on the same blind spot for probably, about a year.

Half way through 2013 I landed myself a job in Scotland working for the BBC. I had applied for a job as Story Editor on a Scottish drama series called *River City*. In an unusual set of circumstances I got the job and was required to start a month later. I did so and continued to write my novel. The circumstances I found myself in in Scotland, coupled with a stimulating work environment opened my creative potential in ways that I was craving and had had no idea of how to achieve. The latter half of my novel became a reflection of that process.

Research vs. fiction, the dangers of historical tourism

One of my favourite quotes by Dr. Bronwyn Law-Viljoen regarding my book is this; 'be careful of historical tourism. It feels like you're constantly trying to prove the veracity of your research. Be careful of writing a guidebook.'

She was right. I fell often and deeply into the trap of writing an historical guidebook. I fell in love with Johannesburg in the 1940's. It sounded like what Dubai represents today, a fake city. A city built with all the latest technology on an utterly false premise, a bit like Montecasino. It felt dangerous, crass but glamorous. I wanted to make my reader fall in love with it. I loved Charles Van Onselen's books about Johannesburg, in particular *The Fox and the Flies* as well as the book about Nongolozo, the first gangster. I love the fact that Johannesburg has always been a frontier town, where criminals and big business go hand in hand. That everything is new, tasteless, violent and ebullient.

I wanted Johannesburg to become a character in my story. I don't think I've fully achieved this yet. But it remains one of my intentions. I feel like I have attempted to create the city character, and have succeeded from a certain perspective. But I haven't gone far enough. It's still an intellectual space as opposed to a feeling space. I wanted to do a draft in which I only focus on city descriptions. I'm still going to do it. Not only for the veracity of my story but because I feel that I owe it to Johannesburg, in my opinion, a much maligned city when it comes to description.

In his book, *How Fiction Works,* James Wood describes how Flaubert uses realist narration: 'the confusing of habitual detail with dynamic detail. How lifelike the effect is – in a beautifully artificial way. Flaubert's details belong to different time- signatures, some instantaneous and some recurrent, yet they are smoothed together as if they are all happening simultaneously.' [Wood, 2009: p 34]

He goes on to draw a comparison between realist narration and war reportage. 'The crime writer and the war reporter merely increase the extremity of this contrast between important and unimportant detail, converting it into a tension between the awful and the regular; a soldier dies while nearby a little boy goes to school.' [Wood, 2009: p 35]

I tried consciously to do this. Like everything else, it cannot be me who is the judge of how successfully I have achieved this. One can only hope that there is a measure of an attempt.

Explicitness vs. inference; the challenge of writing in a different medium

A good screenplay is a work of art, and a blueprint for a director, and the actors. In screenplay writing description is called action. The following scene from *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz is one such example:

INT. PROJECTION ROOM – DAY

It is dark.

The image of Kane as an old man remains constant on the screen as camera pulls back, slowly taking in and registering Projection room. The shadows of the men speaking appear as they rise from their chairs – black against the image of Kane's face on the screen.

During the entire course of this scene, nobody's face is really seen. Sections of their bodies are picked out by table light, a silhouette is thrown on the screen, and their faces and bodies are themselves thrown into silhouette against the brilliant slanting rays of light from the projection room.

A third man is on the telephone. We see a corner of his head and the phone.

THIRD MAN

(At phone)

Stand by. I'll tell you if you want to run it again.

(Hangs up)

THOMPSON'S VOICE

Well?

A short pause

A MAN'S VOICE

It's a tough thing to do in a newsreel. Seventy years of a man's life –

[Jennifer Van Sijll, 2005, p 21]

The scene is mysterious and creates suspense. Yet the description is bald and overt and contains no inference, or mystery. A recurring feedback for my work was, 'you're too explicit, too obvious, allow the reader to make their own assumptions.' I believe this came from writing scripts, where you do not leave anything to the reader's imagination.

I battled with the technical aspects of how to create a sense but not over explain everything for the reader. I instinctively knew that fiction was about creating mystery, yet I had no idea how to do this.

Screenplay writing's artistry arguably lies in the space between what is written and what the director takes from it to realize on screen. If the script is good it will evoke a visual response that drives the director to create pictures and meaning that reflect the sub-text of the characters and their journeys.

I began to realise that part of the process of writing fiction is to cross from the baldness of concrete description in screenwriting and take on the director's role in filmmaking. That is, to use image in non-linear ways to create meaning, back story, and sub-text. I finally realised that there is less of a leap from screenplay writing to fiction than I had initially surmised. Describing action is inferring emotion. All I needed to do was describe the action of characters simply, sentence by sentence. I have no idea why it took me so long to reach this conclusion.

I began to insert a memory mechanism for Janis, which explored her relationship with her brother in relation to their father. I wanted to suggest that she was a witness to her father's abuse. It began to feel too intrusive and overbearing, so I toned it down. I hope I've toned it down enough. I'm beginning to realise that it is enough to create the question of why Janis feels compelled to witness and empathise with other people's pain, and create a series of dreams, hints, and glimpses into why that may be as opposed to concretely locking it down.

Strengths and Weaknesses

After two years of working on my novel in drips and drabs in another country I felt adrift and at sea. The lack of contact with my class was problematic. The fact that I was living in another country was stimulating and challenging, but it was also distancing. I felt out of touch with my material.

I read *What I talk about when I talk about running.* Murakami's pragmatic analysis of the process of writing was helpful. It made me intensely interrogate everything I'd been told at every workshop about every chapter of my novel. I have decided that when it comes to writing prose my strength is dialogue and my weakness is description. That it is something I have struggled with immensely and it is something that I will always have to work on.

I have a tendency to over qualify, and to explain everything. I merge actions, emotions, people and point of view into jumbled sentences that creates distance. When I edited my novel I did so with the following aims in mind: I wanted to create interiority via action and reaction. I knew that I needed to make my characters active. In order to put the action first I needed to break sentences down into single actions.

I've realised that my dialogue is strong and I need to apply that same principle to interiority. My dialogue is minimal and pared back and I need to apply the same technique when creating interiority.

Conclusion

Ironically the process of novel writing has brought me back to contemplate screenwriting once more. I wanted to write a novel instead of a screenplay because I believed it was the only way to tell a story that could move beyond a certain artifice, a superficiality of character journey. I no longer believe this is true.

Writing a novel has made me realise there are constraints in any form, just as there are liberations. That one can write anything. That inherently the process of writing is the same across any medium. It is quite simply about scrambling in darkness. It's also about finding release in doing so. It also requires that you suspend criticism until all the words are on the page.

Then, it's about removing what you've written. Cutting great swathes of hard work, and staring at the emptiness it leaves behind. Hoping, but never being quite sure that that space brings newness, rejuvenated story. Mostly, writing is about asking questions and finding a way of accepting that you may never be able to answer them.

Even as I write that line it feels counter-intuitive. But it's the only conclusion I can come to. It goes back to Socrates, 'I know everything, and yet I know nothing.'

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