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Colin Fanning

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Writing as Nerdy & Slightly Obscure

# Dance Form

*Work with me here.*

By: Colin Fanning

*You would think that, since I have minors in both Writing and English & Textual Studies (Creative Writing emphasis), I'd have some internal, firmly-cemented philosophy or mission concerning writing—that I want to write to exorcise the demons of my childhood, say, or to solve the wrongs of the world, or to create artistic and deeply profound masterpieces.*

YOU WOULD, HOWEVER, HAVE TO THINK AGAIN, BECAUSE MY CHILDHOOD WAS fine, and I doubt I have any hidden psychological trauma from the years of watching *Star Trek* and reading so much that my parents had to force me to go outside and play. Although I don't not want to solve the wrongs of the world, I know I don't have anything particularly new to say in that department and I'd prefer to leave it to the folks who know what they're doing. Similarly, the only profundity I've ever been able to achieve when it comes to writing involves avocado soup. (I ... just ... don't ask.) So you can imagine how the question of why, exactly, I write is sort of complicated for me.

The first thing that jumps to mind is that I write because, since high school, my teachers have told me that I'm good at it. As cynical and as lazy as that sounds, it's true, in a way. The primary reason I'm a Writing minor is because at the end of Writing 109—in my first semester of college—Dr. Agnew essentially told me that she'd pester me until I joined the program. I never even really considered myself a "writer" until my English teachers in high school started including comments on my report cards along the lines of "He reads with perspicacity and writes with aplomb." (Well, okay, not all of my teachers were so ... exuberant in their choice of vocabulary, but

oh man, you should meet this one teacher I had. The guy was completely awesome in a sort of crazy—oh, hi, Mr. Reynolds.) Everyone loves a little positive reinforcement, right? It's still somewhat of a surprise to me—the fact that my writing is met with such responses—because I honestly don't see what I'm doing that's so special. I don't think it's inaccurate to say that I started pursuing writing once I realized that good things tended to happen when I did it.

I'm not entirely satisfied with that answer, though, because ... I love to write. I don't just do it for a grade or a pat on the back (although those are certainly welcome side effects)—I genuinely enjoy writing. I like the potential of it, the endless possibilities of words. With them, you can go anywhere and do anything, and no matter how cliché that sounds, it is always true. It's the same reason I love (love, love, love, love) reading, and whenever I experience a piece of truly wonderful writing, I look at it and think, "That. I want to do that." I write to be closer to those authors and poets whose works have touched me in some way; I write with the tiniest sliver of hope that someday I'll be that good, that someday I might be able to put my own creations forth for someone other than me and my professors to read.

And sometimes? Sometimes I write because I just have to. The impulse is usually environmental; it will be a summer evening and a heavy rainstorm will just be ending, rolling off east over the prairie. I don't know why, but it's always easier to read the direction of a storm in Colorado. It leaves the sky cloudy, and in that fleeting moment before the setting sun breaks and lights the faces of the houses across the street, the grey light comes falling through my window in such a way that I have no choice but to grab my journal and sit on the floor listening to Antje Duvekot while I scribble down something roughly poem-shaped. There are those occasional moments where something—a particular color of sky, the twenty-eight robins that have suddenly decided to roost in the locust tree out front—will just grab me in that peculiar way, tap into my ingrained sense of beauty or humor. Then suddenly, a little lighted placard in my head that says "writer" blinks on. (Hee. "We've reached our cruising altitude of 35,000 feet and the captain has turned on the writer sign." I ... what's that? No aviation pun? But ... I ... okay.) I've got a poem or two already mentally outlined. Or not. There are just as many times, if not more, that something catches my eye and I think "gosh, I'd like to write about that," but nothing's there.

It's a frustrating binary, this all-or-nothing disease that seems to plague my writing efforts, and too often it's the same when I dance. Some days I am just on—I dance my reel and manage to stay up on my toes and hit every heel-click, or the treble-and-toe-ups in my hornpipe all fall into place perfectly. Other days, it's like Irish dance and I are having a lover's quarrel: I'm all knees, and my hardshoes aren't fitting right, which makes treble jig and hornpipe sheer torture. And maybe halfway through the left foot of my first reel step I forget where I'm supposed to turn, and after each disastrous dance I actually start cursing at my feet because they can't do anything right.

But the feeling of a perfect leap-two-three, or getting through that tetchy middle part of a step to the exhilarating last few beats, the part when I think to myself, I know I can do this—it's the same thrill I get when I'm writing and I reach a point where I know precisely how the piece is going to end, what the last line will look like and exactly which words to use. The rest of the essay, or poem, or whatever, spreads itself out before me and that feeling—before I go back and read what I've written hours, days, years later and think, “God, I actually wrote that? And thought it was good?” and promptly decide that I should do the world a favor and never again put cursor to Word document—that trust in words, before all the self-doubt and criticism, that one moment of real, honest creativity? That. That is why I write. §

