

THE WORLD'S GONNA END ANYWAY...

A Statement of Poetics by Mason Bingley

Writing is an individual, unique experience, but for every writer, the process of it is almost universal. Here I don't aim to give you a curriculum on 'how to write', but more remind you that your hardship and successes alike are a commonality we likely share. They're something many writers would sooner sweep beneath the rug than allow you comfort in. Writing isn't just the act of producing content, it is thinking, it is learning, it is developing, and it is EXHAUSTING. I believe we all go through some key processes (*there's at least five I can pinpoint, you'll see, I'm going in on all of them*), and something wonderful usually comes out of it all. You just have to trust the process.

Let's take it to the beginning where everything is glowing, and the land of hopes and dreams has never seemed so vivid. It seems nothing can distill your contentment, but don't enjoy it for too long... The world's gonna end, your world, my world, everybody's world, so what's the point in going on?! Let me take you on my journey through all of this; maybe our experiences of being a writer or just being human aren't too dissimilar, and maybe, just MAYBE, something wonderful is yet to come?

PART I – All Seems Bright & Beautiful



Doctor Who GIF (Tennant, D & Starrycinnamon, 2013)

LIGHT BULB MOMENT! An idea pops up, the heavens rest, that one snotty nostril clears, and my life-long run of tiredness seemingly melts away like *Frosty the Snowman* in a greenhouse. There's nothing quite like the instant when I get an idea for something new to write. The future has an *Emmy* award in it, and I find myself pacing my bedroom at 2AM planning my acceptance speech for this brand-new idea I haven't even written yet.

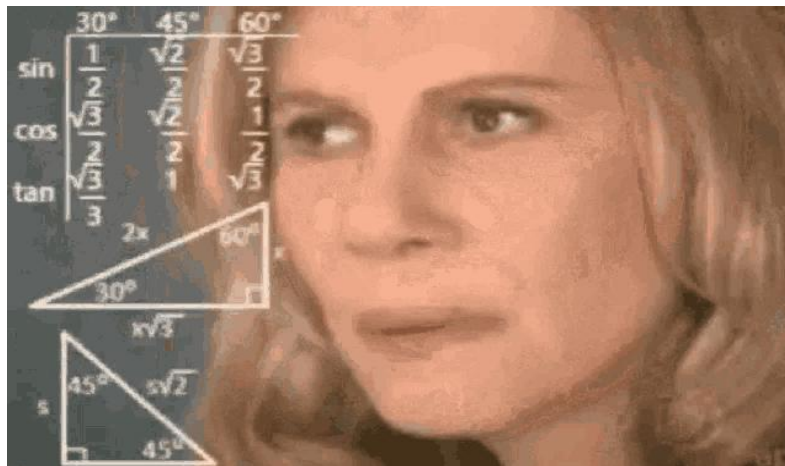
That initial excitement is a driving force behind my practice, and it's where I get most of my work done. It's not uncommon. I feel like a kid on their way to *Alton Towers*; there's unbridled passion and joy all the way. George Saunders said a few years ago, "There is something wonderful in feeling the presence of the writer within you" (2017), and that's exactly what this period encompasses. Saunders also speaks of writing as a "three-beat movement" which is a metaphor I think about often as I create. This rush is those first couple of beats as he compares it to the act of juggling. "A juggler gathers bowling pins [and] throws them in the air..." This burst of creativity is all of these pins spinning, catching stories, and welding them into narratives to be told. In these early times, so much can be developed and jotted down, readying me for my hit series on *Netflix*. This has been the start of so many pieces: *Dining Out*, my musical theatre work, *The Big Review*, and some flash fiction in the past. Everything of mine begins somewhere, and it's usually throwing these pins, seeing where they land, and being unstoppably giddy about writing.

Back down to Earth, however... At this stage, there is a very long way ahead, and these are the glimmers of beauty where my ideas are just fluttering into existence. This is where I nurture my creativity the most, I lean into it daringly, and I trust my abilities more than I would even when something's complete. At the start of everything, I am at my bravest. My favourite writer of all time, Russell T Davies (*Doctor Who*, *Queer as Folk* & *It's A Sin*) said "if you want to be a fearless writer, be fearless in your writing" (2021). This is the truest the statement can feel for where I am in my journey. It may be early, but this is where the fire burns brightest, so it's only natural that fearlessness comes into play.

I do truly find myself writing dialogue with ease, I can describe scenes with flair, and with my non-fiction work, I can seemingly delve deeper into every topic because the burning passion hasn't yet had chance to be dimmed. As a writer who swerves through a plethora of genres, that passion to thrive is wholly necessary, and my saboteur hasn't quite done its meddling yet. In other words, the anxiety hasn't quite got me in a chokehold! Charles Bukowski's poem 'So you want to be a writer' (the long-lost verse to Shania Twain's smash hit) opens with a line that will stick with me – "if it doesn't come bursting out of you in spite of everything, don't do it" (Bukowski & Martin, 2004). I take that like this: I seemingly have the world at my fingertips, and I'm playing God with a new gang of characters and stories. This is exactly how *Dining Out* began – so I grant myself the ability to ENJOY writing. If this joy isn't fizzing like ice in scolding oil... Wait. Sometimes, the world of ideas just isn't ready. I know my work won't play out unless I see myself plotting the lines whilst watching *The Chase* or wishing the early hours away getting into character. Everyone will have their little quip that coins their glee so perfectly... I wait for it to smack me in the face like British summer humidity.

The whole point of this part in my journey is that we are unstoppable and we "do whatever brings us to life..." (Gilbert, 2016). We're evolving, we're learning, we're typing away faster than what seems possible, and the civilisation of our art is kicking into action, willing towards a bright and daring future. However, this cannot last forever. Is anything that simple? No. This isn't a fairytale story of success. I live in a world that churns out potholes and roadblocks faster than episodes of *Emmerdale*, so living in this early bubble of passion can only get me so far before the inevitable: an existential crisis.

PART II – Existential Crisis



Math Lady GIF (Bluemoonlady14, 2020)

The next stage in the process. Life is never straight-forward, and writing is certainly no different. That initial glee wore thin, and I'm now left trudging through the abyss of jovial memories and withered storylines I hadn't quite managed to intertwine. This is the crisis of realising that this ship has holes in it. The earlier stage felt like things slotted effortlessly, but now I'm attempting to give my writing three dimensions, the shape is quickly being lost. When there's too many ideas, things slip through and fester like an infection. This could come about through a continuity error I can't understand, to a character that just doesn't seem to fit. Either way, the fantasy has been derailed. What now?!

Let me try and explain myself here... First of all, I take a lot of inspiration from the likes of screenwriters like Russell T Davies. I feel every screenwriter (well, writer for that matter) has a technique and charm that is quintessentially their own. In *Doctor Who: The Writer's Tale*, Davies talks of his early process, and I share this sentiment – "I think, and think, and think... and by the time I come to write, a lot has been decided" (Davies & Cook, 2008). As I plan near enough everything, it seems my work will be like the Titanic – unsinkable... Look how that turned out. One big error and I sink to the bottom of the ocean, which is what this segment is, it's that first hit, and the impending doom my writing brain then realises. Another way I picture it, and it also being an issue I faced myself as a child, is getting to *Alton Towers* and not being tall enough to ride 'Nemesis'. That moment of 'well, that's my

life ruined'. I take great pride in being in control, so when something goes wrong, I can't always bandage up the damage, and I slip into darkness.

I guess that's why I realise another thing at this stage: my writing is a constant imperfection. *The Writer's Tale* also reveals that "writers are self-pitying", and this is simply my moment of pity coming in to play. I'm questioning my abilities, and I just can't quite stretch the tape any further to hold everything together.

Is this normal?

I shake myself. I take a second. Yes. It is normal.

Steven Moffat (*Doctor Who*, *Sherlock* & *The Inside Man*) spoke of this in an interview, "No-one is that self-assured when they're writing, or that assured about their writing" (Moffat & Arnopp, n.d). This is just the unfortunate truth, and in this stage of my writing, it rears its very overbearing, massive head. Of course, I do write comedy a lot and that is one of the hardest tasks I seem to put myself through, so the crises I face feel catastrophic. Michaela Coel (*Chewing Gum* & *I May Destroy You*) also treats writing like a journey. If she reaches a stop sign in her craft, she just takes a backseat - "I have googled how to write a TV show" (2020) she says. Sometimes you just need to work through it "even though you know it's not going to be good" and on the very odd occasion, I can do this, but for the most-part my motto is... Disinterest until it's interest. That backseat has never been comfier.

As said, sometimes I do try and fight the struggle, but ignoring that saboteur or attempting to bridge those gaps just feels impossible. Whilst I was writing *Dining Out* (my latest comedy about working in hospitality), I realised that something just wasn't quite working. There were issues with the pacing, characters didn't feel fully realised and the story felt overstuffed with things that did not contribute anything substantial. This realisation did not result in a quick turnaround of fixes. I wound up remove plot lines and a full character whilst straightening up every storyline remaining, and this took a good eight months to do after the initial draft. Time is powerful (I'll discuss this soon). Paul Abbott (*Shameless* & *Clocking Off*) had a similar experience with his latest smash-hit show, *No Offence*. He dreamed of the

story in 2006, but the show didn't hit our screens until nine years later. The idea of it started walking in the entirely wrong direction. In an interview, he said "it was way off beam. We got the writing wrong" (2015) and this comment has stuck with me. Sometimes, knowing how to fix something will not be immediate and unfortunately, in this stage, we're at the very beginning of this process.

To re-iterate, the 'existential crisis' is, at its core, the steady decline into disinterest in my work. Michaela Coel did speak of writing even if it isn't good, but I am that person far too rarely. My writing is far from perfect, but I want to feel good writing it. I don't want to write if I've become emotionally detached. Like any relationship, you go through so many highs and lows, and this is just the end of the honeymoon phase.

What happens next, though? Well, this is the start of a very long bout of reflection and disconnect from writing. Of course, I could just wallow in self-pity, or I could use it to grow as a person and embrace that this is something writer's just do. If all deadlines and restrictions are put aside, this is naturally what comes next for me.

Where will the world take me? Will the joy of writing crafting words come back this time, or am I just hoping for a miracle?

PART III – What the Hell we Gon’ do Now?



Ms Juicy GIF (Pearson & Curry, 2019)

Here we are... An ungodly amount of time passing and no writing to show for it – nothing for that *Emmy* acceptance speech at least.

At this stage, I don't feel like a writer, I'm just creative. I can no longer churn content out; even machines need turning off once in a while and I feel my brain is no different. This segment regards what I call my 'greatest contradiction'.

I want to write, and create, and be something, but I cannot bring myself to do so. What do I do instead? This is my reflective period. When I write, it's easy to get caught up in the storm of it all, and this is that tornado landing me back on Earth. Even the biggest and brightest of our age have periods of nothingness. "I procrastinated like nobody's business. Sometimes, I just didn't want to do it, sometimes life was happening" (Rogen & Brunson, 2021). That was Quinta Brunson, and she churned out *Abbott Elementary*, one of the finest comedies of our time. Creativity, in my opinion, cannot be forced, so taking some chill time in between recharges the battery... We hope.

As this is a reflective interval, I'll take it back a few years. As a young kid writing was an outlet. I'd write my own *Goosebumps* stories, fully equipped with a carefully coloured front cover and full marketing package to go alongside. I'd throw together scripts that likely made no sense, but I had the time of my life doing so, also! At this point, I miss that fun, but even

then I knew perseverance was vital, whether that meant you carried on writing, or you got busy with life as Quinta Brunson did writing *She Memes Well*.

Who exactly am I though? What do I get from writing? Why do I matter? What makes me, me?

I don't want to write with the most ambitious vocabulary that even the *Oxford English Dictionary* would be in awe. I don't want to write the next *War & Peace*. I don't want to be what I think a writer should be according to my internal stereotypes. I want to make cheesy jokes in the rule of three where the most ludicrous thing somehow pays out for the metaphor I'm trying to sell. I want to write worlds and characters based off that one random regular I served in my years of hospitality or even just the people I've met in the town centre. To put the cherry on top, and if all of the finest screenwriters in the world collectively declined, I'd write for *Doctor Who*. One day my story based on *Jekyll & Hyde* where a monster with a duality in nature will attack Robert Louis Stevenson in his hometown of Bournemouth in 1885, will come to fruition, I know it. Just you wait.

Yet, I find myself here. Caitlin Moran did once say "cynicism means you presume everything will end in disappointment" (2014). This stage is pretty much that cynic taking over – why do I bother? When that sceptic becomes my mind's protagonist, I assume I can't. So, I remember who I am in the first place to try and build myself up.

Time ticks on. I've self-loathed, binged a few series of *The Golden Girls* and successfully procrastinated writing. Now I consider my signature even further; if I were a director, people may call it 'being an auteur'. I need to rediscover the passion. First of all, I love TV, and that's really what my whole shtick is about, as is the case for a lot of my favourite writers. Sally Wainwright's love started young, as did mine, she was "obsessed with TV at quite an early age and knew quite early on that [she] wanted to work in telly" (Wilson, 2023) and look at her now. She's knocking out smash hit shows (*Last Tango in Halifax* for example) like no other. Another thing, she mentions is that her characters are an "amalgamation of many things and yourself", and I second this. My life may not appear interesting, but nobody else has lived my experiences or my interactions with the world and the people in it.

It's powerful when people learn how to bring that to the page in an interesting way because my uniqueness is my superpower. Michaela Coel also supports this - "the stories that we come up with are based on our own biases and our own experiences even when we don't know it" (2020).

On that note, like Wainwright and many others, I am a proud northerner. My *Dining Out* work had to be set in Yorkshire, and my voice in anything has a twinge of my dialect, even my *Big Review* posts. Kay Mellor, from Leeds where my script is set, spoke highly of her heritage, "I am Leeds born and bred, and the city, both architecturally and socially, feeds my creativity" (2014). I wouldn't be the writer I am today without places like Leeds, and Wakefield, and of course my hometown, Castleford (Cas Vegas to the locals). They have shaped me into who I am today, and I want to share that with the world because, in all honesty, I really am quite grateful for it. Their voices should be told because nobody is quite like a typical Yorkshireman with their pint of *John Smith's*, farmer's cap, and inability to use the letter 'T'.

Back to something I mentioned earlier, I have to fight the idea of what a writer is that I have entrenched in my mind. It's usually someone (an older elite, aristocratic white man) who reads like their life depends on it who can reel writers off like a shopping list, and know writing like Willy Wonka knows chocolate. It's not always like that, and a writer doesn't have to write novels or poems, they don't have to be upper-class and have a passion for Shakespeare or Wordsworth... They can be Kay Mellor writing about friends in dieting clubs (*Fat Friends*), they can be Caitlin Moran writing about an average Birmingham family and their quirks (*Raised by Wolves*), they can be Sally Wainwright writing about a copper from good old Yorkshire (*Happy Valley*), and they can be ME. I would say that this is my biggest issue... I fear I am not what the world expects a writer to be, so I convince myself there's no point in trying. You look back and there's nobody quite like me being studied in a GCSE syllabus, and I feel this shapes my mindset as to what is 'good' in the writer's world.

I quickly forget that my voice has power because society trains me to feel inadequate. The many years of a toxic patriarchy for you. However, some of the finest voices on TV and in the writing world are from similar backgrounds. A voice of power can come from anywhere,

not just history and Parliament. Just sitting here, there's an endless list of creators I haven't even mentioned who inspire me: Caroline Aherne, Diane Morgan, Lucy Beaumont, Sarah Millican, Alan Carr, Jed Mercurio, Malorie Blackman, Lisa McGee, Sophie Willan... The list goes on, likely endlessly. So, perhaps, just maybe... I am correct to consider myself a writer. It might not be a list of novelists, but it's a list of writers and creatives, nonetheless. Is it straying from what I perceive a typical writer to be, yes, and I need to remember that that's, well, perfectly fine.

That saboteur is a nasty piece of work, but I know that's all it is – my inner turmoil. Hopefully one day this stage in my process will be nothing but a distant memory, but until then, I will do what I can to paddle through the choppy waters and remember the greats that inspired.

Is it now time to start writing again?

PART IV – The Second Coming



Trixie Mattel GIF (Firkus, B & IdaEriksson1, 2022)

After every great drought, comes the flood. This is the surge of energy I've been desperately waiting the past however many weeks for! It's quite a common practice that I just have to battle the treacherous seas of impending doom to come into the clearing, and I've finally sailed through it.

This rush of momentum usually manifests from something someone said, perhaps a joke I could use in a script, or perhaps the show I'm currently watching has a particularly fantastic episode? I have watched so much TV, made the show my personality, thrown out some writing, and moved on to my next obsession more times than I can count. I don't have to have an original idea every time I put pen to paper (or fingertip to keyboard in my case) because the work of other creatives is there to entertain firstly, but mostly inspire. As long as it isn't a direct copy, harnessing the skills and quips of others to make my signature shine is the blessing of being a writer. If someone were to use my work to inspire their own, I feel like I'd done my part. I've mentioned a lot of names throughout this statement, but it's the media created by these people that really does impact me most and it's usually what gets my creative juices flowing. A couple of examples:

1. *Doctor Who*... Without this, we wouldn't have shows like *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon. The main character is inspired by a 60's companion played by Frazer Hines (Jamie McCrimmon) and is set in Scotland; this being inspired by Jamie being a highlander in the show. When Hines was asked about how Gabaldon approached the show, he said "the next day she went to church, all she could think about were 'your legs and Jamie's stoic-ness and I had to write a book'" (Debnath & Hines, 2023). Now, Gabaldon's show is a cult classic, and she used *Doctor Who* as a huge inspiration, so what's stopping me?!

2. *The Golden Girls*... I wouldn't be writing comedy if I wasn't brought up on classic 80's & 90's shows like this one. This show was the most forward-thinking zeitgeists for the 80's, and that is what stuck with me. Comedy is a powerful medium. Josie Long (a stand-up comedian, author of *Because I Don't Know What You Mean and What You Don't*, and a fellow *Doctor Who* fan), says "Satire is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted" (O'Hara & Long, 2022). Humour can do a lot of work to impact people both in and out of the know, and that's what I love about it. I'm hoping I can harness this as I write more within the genre. I truly feel the best comedy is those that pack a sharp message. *The Golden Girls* covered so much that helped its massive audiences understand AIDS, menopause, same-sex marriage, sexism, ageism, and so much more. Comedy matters!

These two programmes are my reliant robins, you could say, and the root inspiration behind so much of what I produce: *Dining Out* & *The Big Review* being prime examples. TV is my go-to. No matter where the charm of creativity sparkles, it'll find a way to construct itself into something or other. I don't believe in fate, but sometimes the right show at the right time can feel like the heavens have enlightened me. I recently read *Golden Girls Forever* by Jim Colucci, and it speaks of how the iconic role of 'Rose Nylund' nearly went to Rue McLanahan and not Betty White. By doing "something unorthodox" (2017), Betty White took the role and they all won numerous awards for their legendary roles that they're all known for even now. Sometimes decisions are made well into the creative process, and they wind up being the best decisions ever made, but they take time to get there. I'd like to think that this was Jay Sandrich's (the first director of the show) experience with this stage in his own process.

Thinking of everything as a whole, coming to my work with a rejuvenated pair of eyes is where I believe things can finally start to flourish. Beyond how great my favourite shows are, in this segment, I understand myself better. I'm wiser, I've grown, and somehow feel so much more confident. I can look back at writing from a mere few months ago, and instantly feel better about its direction. A 'second-draft rush' I could call it. A lot of writers find power in re-drafting, Michaela Coel once again sharing this sentiment. "Redrafting over and over again... Is probably the best component to a good story" (2020). It might be hard work, but it's rewarding when you sense things properly coming together.

Of course, this burst of passion doesn't always correlate to work that has come before, but it sure helps knowing the fire is burning once again. I recently read *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni-Eddo Lodge, and that has inspired an array of non-fiction workings. It has also dramatically enhanced my knowledge on the topics touched on in the book. Because I read it at this stage in my process, and the work was so passionate, it pushed me to follow things that mattered to me, like the homosexuality experience or just some of my innermost interests... Television viewing figures, for example. As I said, sometimes the right thing at the right time can really pull something fantastic out of you, and this thoroughly brilliant piece of work from Lodge did just that.

I surf genres and forms a lot, and this is why I find this segment of my arc so interesting... I never quite know where my creativity will land. I could end up drafting another episode of *Dining Out* or adding another post to my *Big Review*. With so much variation, I never bore of my writing. As I've mentioned, *Dining Out* went through several changes, and this felt like my 'unorthodox' moment, that has hopefully led to something far superior to what came many months ago. Without my lull in production, I doubt I would've got there.

In other words, thank you to the many creatives out there because I really do rely on you.

With new ideas bubbling, old ideas refreshed, and a new hope instilled... What next?

PART V – The Future



Schitt's Creek GIF (O'Hara, C & Hope, S. 2020)

Picture it... The future! When it comes to my craft, I am nothing if not VERY negative about it, but I do balance it with the occasional note of positivity. My emotions are like a pendulum swing, one second I'll think 'I'll die anyway, so what's the point' and the next breath is 'I can make a difference!' This whole thing is the motion on that spectrum. I guess it doesn't help I am a very anxious person too, but as I do with everything in life, I choose to ignore that factor.

Now, on one hand: **OPTIMISM** (peaks in Part I & IV). I have a plethora of work, I have stuff out there for people to read, I make posters, I design my own content, I have my own brand online (*Ratings UK* on *X* & *Instagram* for those not in the know), and soon enough, a degree to say, 'I know how to write' (hopefully). Hard work & dedication usually winds up with some payoff in the end. As the saying goes - good things come to those who wait.

On the other hand: **PESSIMISM** (peaks at Part I & III). This is my biggest detriment - my stormy outlook on life and my own ability. I look at just how saturated the creative industry

is and despair. Why is my voice in these few decades going to be important in the five-billion-year history of humankind? What will my words matter when the sun expands, engulfs the Earth and nothing is left but dust? That's if we even make it that far. I am 'catastrophising' of course, but also... I'm speaking facts.

How do I manage such a juxtaposition in emotion?

I have to use them in unison.

I write because I won't be here one day, but through my words, my legacy can remain, and I can smile.

I might just be a ginger, left-handed, blue-eyed, poor, Northerner with a limp wrist and a passion for TV, but all of those together make me into something unique. In the Victorian era, I'd likely be ostracised and set ablaze, and that's just for being a lefty, but as of right now, my voice *could* be quite formidable to the right listener. It seems the more niche, the more power. If I can make someone giggle with my comedy work, or that one attempt at stand-up I did about my brain I can't seem to switch off, I will (this was called *Comically Anxious*, and I think it was a pretty solid start if I do say so myself). If I can entertain and inform through science-fiction scripts, my big reviews, or my viewing figure posts on my ratings account all about statistics and UK TV, then I will. I can bend genres, and inspire new forms of writing, I can write provocative content to get the minds of readers racing, and I can hopefully write something to get you thinking about the world we live in. However, above all else, if I am gifted the time and ability to write freely and unequivocally as myself then... I most definitely will!

So, I'm speaking directly to you now, you've stuck around until the end, learnt my story and my process, and if you don't want to stick pins in your eyes, gold stars for you! If you're a tiny bit inspired, even in the slightest, remember... Yes, the world is going to end one day, so you might as well write to your heart's content, because, who knows, your legacy may end up timeless. Wouldn't that be lovely? I sit now in, I think I'm in a stage of promise, and I

hope you join me here. The world is big, and your time is short, so you might as well do something awesome even if your mind doesn't always think it possible.

This is my little thing, go tell the world yours. Let me leave you with this provocation...

Consider this: the words here are yours now. Hold them tightly like a chick freshly hatched, caress them, nurture them, breathe life into them as you would your soul on a frosty morning. How do they feel? The sharp edges of harsh vowels, and the softening touch of an endless vision. What do you hide in your seas and oceans? Take these words and make them your own, let our worlds collide on this page.

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