Bust a (Writing) Move: Revising with the Stars

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If we can learn writing moves from mentor texts, why not learn revision moves from mentor texts, too?

An Inspiration: Poetry Locker Signs

- Demystified a form
- Showed students that poets were people, too

A Challenge: create a cache of professional writers' revision-in-action to use as revision mentor texts

Poetry must have something in it that is barbaric, vast and wild.

Denis Diderot

Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.

G.K. Chesterton

Poetry is like fish: if it's fresh, it's good; if it's stale, it's bad; and if you're not certain, try it on the cat.

Osbert Sitwell

Poetry, like the moon, does not advertise anything.

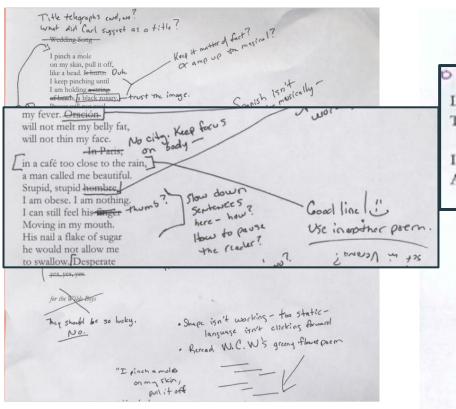
William Blissett

Collection #1: Writers on Writing (and how tough it can be!)

I write a sentence. I read it aloud. I delete the sentence. I look at the clock and wonder if it's too early to think about lunch. I tell myself that, if I can make it to 300 words, I can break for lunch. I write another sentence. This one I might like. If I'm lucky, it leads to a second sentence. I think: "What is the point of all of this? Is anyone truly happy?" I delete the second sentence. I check my email. I have 15 new ones. [...] write a few more sentences. I get seven new emails. These ones following up on the emails that I didn't respond to a few days ago. I think: "What exactly does it mean for something to be 'urgent'?" I plead with myself to write at least another 200 words. On the best days, I stop pleading, stop bargaining and watch-checking and fall into a rhythm so satisfying that I simply forget I'm working. So much of my writing day feels like well-digging. Sometimes I dig 200ft down before coming back up, dry. Every day I search for water.

-Yaa Gyasi in "My Writing Day" for The Guardian

Collection #2: Writers (and friends!) Revise



Eduardo C. Corral, "Ceremonial" NY Times Book Review

Talking to Myself My last years should be effortless, solitary, who wants Prome hero, like that ant on the windowsill comvade be a Lifting 606 of his dead chums into his jaws--Overwhelming The remarkable strength, the sense of duty! turkey I put down a dry sandwich And watch him go, staggering back and forth, To be a hundred and twenty, like Moses, Bearded prophet sustained on manna. - dark here atendal If so, then surely the young would hoist me_ In their jaws Tk, on their shoulders and take me away, More bony lumber for the earth, More gristle, more heartache and flowers. beneath the Unlike Moses I get by on sandwiches, Manna Myown kind of manner of myown making. More or less, It's all the same. Three square meals On a plastic plate, then night, then sleep. Gary Soto, The sun is a bloodshot eye in the east, When I wake tired, my water glass empty from my travels. "Talking to Myself" For a hobby, I should collect salt shakers, blue The Atlantic Salt shakers with corked bottoms, Dutch boys & girls

@nyt_diff



Editing TheGrayLady @nyt_diff · 5h

Replying to @nyt_diff

Change in Headline

Slovenia Chooses Between the Incumbent and an Actor Ex-Actor for President

DICTION

Trump Is on Pace to Reshape Rapidly Reshaping the Judiciary. Here's How.

SYNTAX

As Daylight Saving Starts, Some Ask:
Why Fall Clocks Turn Back at All?
Sunday, but Some States Wish They
Wouldn't

Revision questions mentor texts encourage:

- How can one word change an image or shape a perception?
- Which lines can you lose?
- Which lines/sentences/paragraphs belong in a different work?

Collection #3: Writers (and Friends!) Annotate Their Work

The Aha!

Dominic Luxford of the McSweeney's Poetry Series

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"My first priority was to retain the conversational tone of the collection. From the beginning, I've told each McSweeney's Poetry Series poet that the best way to understand the editing process is as a conversation. Two people with different viewpoints looking out through different eyes but with the same intention: to make the book as good as it can be."

"There's a kind of transparency that I really like in Arif's work. He brings an unassuming lucidity to life's issues, to the experiences of life. To running in a field or, for that matter, to the impact on a village of the construction of a massive [multinationally built] dam.

"There's something really significant about Jamal refusing to sit in the special seat on his return, choosing instead to sit on the 'plain palm mats.' In some ways, Arif's writing style is the 'plain palm mats'-akin to the choice to sit on them. There's no limit to the potential symbolic power of this. It arguably gets at the root of some of the major religious and ethical and political issues at play throughout history, and it's Arif's gift to present such a theme with such friendly insouciance."

4) "This strikes me as similar to the genesis of the book as a friendly conversation between friends. It's the style and perhaps the overarching concern of the collection. The book could have been subtitled 'among friends.' The tone, the feel, the ethos is one of casual friendliness, respect, and implicit equality."

Return to Serra Mattu

often if a village child went on with school and later graduate work in foreign lands and then came back to work for the government and live in the teeming capital

it meant he was too overwhelmed with soaring plans ever to go home to his humble town and visit former neighbors and old friends

although your father Jamal returned quite regularly to Serra Mattu to see how the people were getting on and what they needed what they felt the government was doing right or wrong Dominic Luxford reads "Return to Serra Mattu" by Arif Gamal in "The Aha! Moment" column. Poets & Writers

soveriment was doing right or wrong

oh come and sit in this special seat we prepared for you they said excitedly but no he only wished to sit with them on plain palm mats spread on the sand and listen to their words and talk as in old days

and dogs and sheep and other animals for their first morning drink and to swim in the fresh waters of the flowing river

while the thousand upon thousand of high unhindered Nubian stars began to fall away before a tinge of milky line along the hills

until light grew from nearly nothing to an immensity.

The Hamiltome! -Lin Manuel Miranda

10 My first draft of this line read,"I don't mean to brag, but my dad was the president of Princeton, soooo . . . " It was funny, but too snotty. I wanted Washington to not trust Burr on a chemical level, the way only really wise people, dogs, and kids can read people on first meeting.

Burr showed valor as a soldier in his own right, and took part in expeditions against the British. He worked for Washington for a few vecks and that's about to We don't know why sey parted. So I made his scene up.

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Washington's tent. Burr enters.

BURR: Your Excellency, sir!

WASHINGTON: Who are you?

BURR: Aaron Burr, sir?
Permission to state my case?

WASHINGTON: As you were.

BURR: Sir,

I was a captain under General Montgomery.

Until he caught a bullet in the neck in Quebec, and well, in summary 9

I think that I could be of some assistance.

I admire how you keep firing on the British from a distance.

my toes in the water and
a shiver
runs
down
my body,
but no matter how cold the water is
I will still get in.

I wait for the perfect wave to run and jump

into. As I see a wave rolling my way, I start running.

The wave is at its peak and then right before it crashes, when the water is crystalline at the top,

I dive through. I feel the water engulf me in and everything goes dead silent,



USING A BIC ballpoint pen, Jerry Seinfeld composes all his jokes on sheets of yellow legal paper, as he's done since 1975 when he first tried his hand at stand-up comedy, He kept every joke, organized alphabetically, but never intended for anyone to see the pages.

"I don't want to say embarrassed, but they were a very private thing for me," Mr. Seinfeld says.

"I don't want people to know how much work I put into it. I just think it's more fun when it seems off the cuff."

The 63-year-old comedian opened up his archives when he made a one-hour special for Netflix. It's the first result of a deal he struck with the streaming service that includes a future special and his interview series "Comedians In Cars Getting, Coffee," which previously ran on Sony's streaming site Crackle.

"Jerry Before Seinfeld," released on Netflix last week, is a stand-up set that doubles as his oral history of an initiation into the comedy life.

The show was shot in a tiny club in Manhattan, the Comic Strip, where Mr. Seinfeld sharpened his skills nightly but hadn't performed in 30 years.

He tells stories of that incubation phase and delivers jokes written in the years leading up to his first appearance on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" in 1981, eight years before the premiere of "Seinfeld."

Though music stars routinely play hits from their back catalog, it's rare for standups to resurrect vintage material.

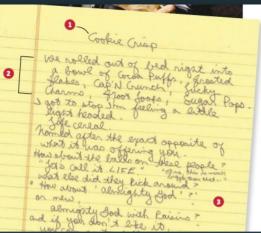
The observations in some of Mr. Seinfeld's old jokes defy aging—his free-range childhood in the 1960s, socks escaping from the laundry, the improbable power or the Notary Public—but it was challenging to get that material back into shape for the new special, he says.

"When a bit is your act and your act is your life, you know every letter of every word. Every note of inflection and timing. And I had forgotten it all. I had to re-learn it."

In a recent interview, Mr. Seinfeld broke down elements of a joke written in his formative years that resurfaced in "Jerry Before Seinfeld." Breaking Down 'Cookie Crisp'
L Long before "Seinfeld" showed a lineup
of cereal boxes in Jerry's kitchen, the comedian was tickled by breakfast foods, especially the sugary brands, "Cereal. It's just
one of the funnest things. It's candy masquerading as food. What a racket," he says.

2. On stage, he ticks off brands. "You want things that are just fun to say. It's fun to say Cocoa Crisp and Fruity Pebbles. It's not fun to say Oat Bran." He hits a high note on the last word, which comes out as a strangled shriek. "Pops has a consonant strength that Froot Loops does not have. Frosted Flakes? Soft. Sugar Pops is on the end and not by coincidence. I plan that out."

3. Of his cursive handwriting, he says, "I love penmanship. I love writing with a

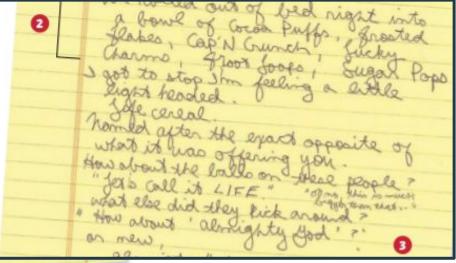


"Jerry Seinfeld Breaks Down a Joke" from *The Wall Street* Journal

Breaking Down 'Cookie Crisp'

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Revision questions that mentor texts encourage:

- What can I discover by explaining my own writing choices?
- What can I discover from a peer reviewer's thoughts on my work?
- What are the qualities of a helpful/informative/inspirational annotation?

When students see that the work they must do is the work professional writers do, too, they are one step closer to realizing that THEY. ARE. WRITERS!