



Vol. 2, No. 8, February 21, 2020

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From the Editor



Hello all!

Are you thinking of a short story to go with one of the three pictures above? There's one month left. ([Details here.](#))

I went to schedule something in for the April 3rd issue, which will be the one-year anniversary of our 1st issue. I had an idea in mind to help thank all the authors that have had an interview over the past year. Then I saw that that's the issue that the short stories will run for the contest. So, I'm rethinking my idea, because I don't want to take away from the short story contest. I might go ahead with my idea to showcase all the authors for the past year and call it a Birthday Edition, separate from the short story contest.

This week we have a guest appearance from John Steinbeck. But he didn't want to be interviewed, he just wanted to give writing advice.

Happy reading and even happier writing!

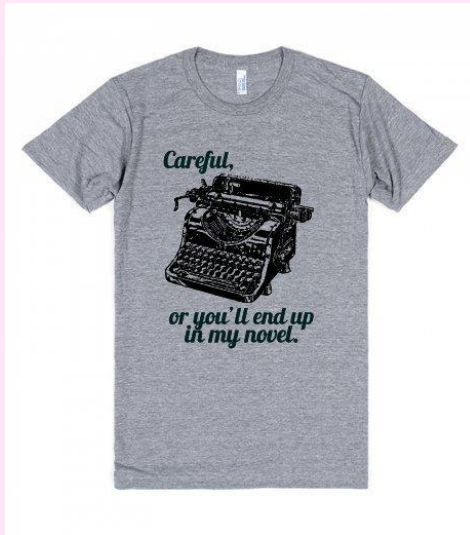
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Characters from Real-Life



As authors, this is common procedure. The characters in our tales often inherit some semblance of traits from those in our real-life sphere. It may only be in bits and pieces – one quality from one person, the persona of another, the looks of still another. We whip the fragments together as if in an authorly blender and, voila. Presto! A new person exists.

Sometimes the attributes of our fictional – or not so fictional – characters are even less disguised.

This practice of borrowing snippets from our everyday life to infuse our writing with realistic people or places is not a new occurrence. Charles Dickens also ‘borrowed’ parts of his real-life experience for his stories and books.

In Shmoop’s study guide on Charles Dickens, they report that Dickens met Maria Beadnell in 1830 and fell in love. Apparently, Maria’s parents were well-to-do and weren’t enamored with the barely 18-year old young Dickens who was working as a freelance reporter at that time. They sent Maria off to school in Paris in their attempt to discourage the young couple. Their efforts succeeded and the relationship ended in 1833. However, it appears that Maria appeared again twenty years later “in Dickens’s thinly-veiled, not-so-nice portrayal of her in *Little Dorrit*.”

However, according to Wikipedia, it reports that “...his first love, Maria Beadnell, thought to have been the model for the character Dora in *David Copperfield*.”

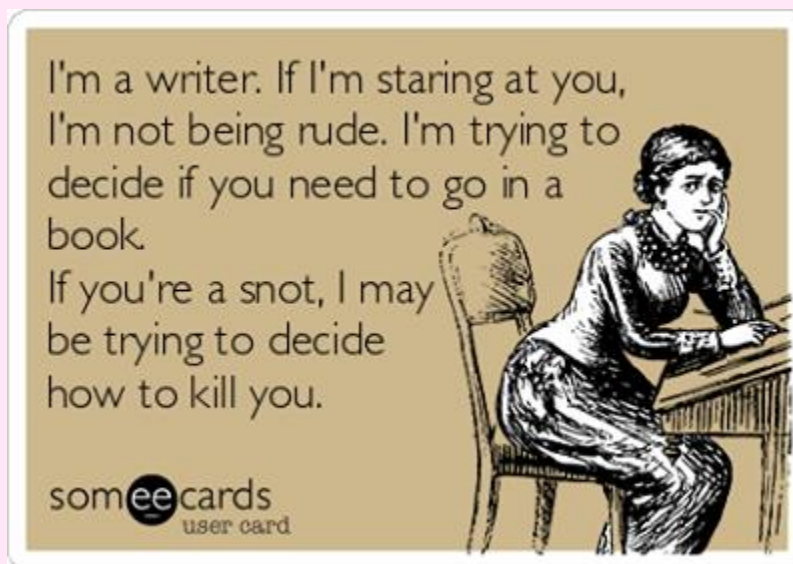
Not having read either work, I’m not qualified to agree or dispute either claim. But now I’m intrigued and may look both works up to see if the characters in both books are similar or not.

In *The Life of Charles Dickens*, he does admit to using a real name in *Oliver Twist*. “One of them came up, in a ragged apron and a paper cap, on the first Monday morning, to show me the trick of using the string and typing the knot. His name was Bob Fagin; and I took the liberty of using his name, long afterwards, in *Oliver Twist*.”

Another young woman showed up in several of Dickens' characters. After he married Catherine Hogarth (Kate) and they started their family, Dickens' brother, Frederick, and Catherine's sister, Mary, moved in with them. Dickens was fond of his 17-year old sister-in-law and grieved for her after she died in his arms following a brief illness in 1837.

"Dickens idealized Mary – the character he fashioned after her, Rose Maylie, he found he could not now kill, as he had planned, in his fiction, and, according to Ackroyd, he drew on memories of her for his later descriptions of Little Nell and Florence Dombey."

If Dickens can do it, so can we. Although, I have a feeling we authors are already 'borrowing' from real life without Dickens' permission. Maybe we shouldn't give away our trade secrets though. Now, the people we know will be reading our works with a closer eye and wondering...Hmmm, is this me?



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Author Spotlight – John Steinbeck

In 1968, a well-known author drew his last breath. I'd never even heard of him. Yet. I was ten years old and spending inordinate amounts of time with my face buried in the pages of Dr. Doolittle and his exploits. I'd graduated from *Charlotte's Web*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*. I hadn't yet progressed to *Grapes of Wrath*, a book that once I discovered it would become one of my top two favorite books of all time.

John Steinbeck was a Pulitzer Prize winner and Nobel laureate, but it would be many years before I discovered the joys of reading his written word. The 1930s is my favorite era to read and write about. I'm not sure if it's the influence of reading *Grapes of Wrath* or hearing the stories from my mom and grandmother about life in those difficult days. I'll give them equal fault.

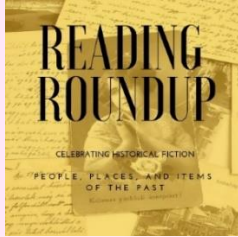


Fortunately, in 1962, this master author shared precious writing advice in a letter to actor and writer Robert Wallsten. This, along with other letters, appears in *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*. Thanks to the legacy he left in written form, here is some writing advice from John Steinbeck.

1. Abandon the idea that you are ever going to finish. Lose track of the 400 pages and write just one page for each day, it helps. Then when it gets finished, you are always surprised.
2. Write freely and as rapidly as possible and throw the whole thing on paper. Never correct or rewrite until the whole thing is down. Rewrite in process is usually found to be an excuse for not going on. It also interferes with flow and rhythm which can only come from a kind of unconscious association with the material.
3. Forget your generalized audience. In the first place, the nameless, faceless audience will scare you to death and in the second place, unlike the theater, it doesn't exist. In writing, your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person and write to that one.
4. If a scene or a section gets the better of you and you still think you want it—bypass it and go on. When you have finished the whole you can come back to it and then you may find that the reason it gave trouble is because it didn't belong there.
5. Beware of a scene that becomes too dear to you, dearer than the rest. It will usually be found that it is out of drawing.
6. If you are using dialogue—say it aloud as you write it. Only then will it have the sound of speech.

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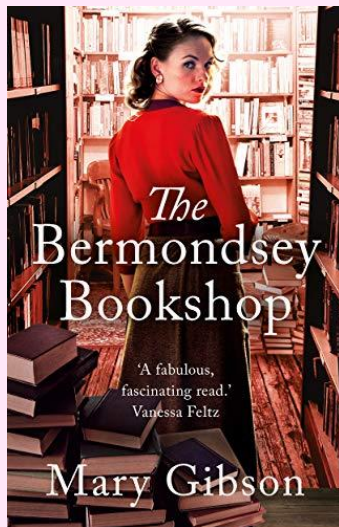
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The 1920s

The Bermondsey Bookshop

Mary Gibson



'Happiness had never been something she'd looked for. A quiet day with no insults or wallops, that was the best she could imagine.'

Set in 1920s London, this is the inspiring story of Kate Goss's struggle against poverty, hunger and cruel family secrets.

Her mother died in a fall, her father has vanished without trace, and now her aunt and cousins treat her viciously. In a freezing, vermin-infested garret, factory girl Kate has only her own brave spirit and dreams of finding her father to keep her going. She has barely enough money to feed herself, or to pay the rent. The factory where she works begins to lay off people and it isn't long before she has fallen into the hands of the violent local money-lender.

That is until an unexpected opportunity comes her way – a job cleaning a most unusual bookshop, where anyone, from factory workers to dockers, can learn to read and then buy books cheaply. A new world opens up, but with it come new dangers, too. Based on the true story of the Bermondsey Bookshop, this is the most inspiring and gripping novel Mary Gibson has yet written.

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