

Does the Writer have a Responsibility?

Mara Menzies

The story always finds us. We then allow it to filter through us and settle in our bones. Even though it may not be complete or perfect, we must still love it and give it space to grow. When it is ready, it will tap persistently at the door, telling us the time to be told has come.

There was once a man who dreamt of greatness. He imagined creating a literary masterpiece that would be sold around the world, placing him in the history books forever. He came from a well-to-do family who loved him and provided him with everything he could possibly desire. Indeed, his life had been blessed with every opportunity, yet the writer felt a degree of shame coming from such privilege, and he decided, therefore, to give voice to the voiceless instead. And so it was that he placed pen to paper.

He recalled the countless books he had read, and the chance encounters he had had on his numerous travels around the world. He decided to create a story filled with adventure, love and mystery that threw many of these diverse experiences of languages and cultures together. In doing so, he believed that the book would resonate with anyone who cast their eye over it.

But the writer did not understand his responsibility for truth. He ignored the advice of his friends who questioned the accuracy of some of his wild statements and exaggerations. He was convinced they did not understand his vision. He was birthing a whole new world, researching all these individual influences seemed rather time-consuming and pointless.

The writer did not understand his responsibility for originality. He wrote and produced his work with astonishing speed, and had the content been filled with new ideas, his readers would have forgiven the frequent grammatical errors littered throughout. But many were peeved at large passages with uncanny similarities in style, language and content to other authors, of whom the writer had previously expressed great admiration.

The writer did not understand his responsibility to respect, for, as his story travelled around the world, many were angered that the writer had taken their most profound guiding principles and twisted them into strange concepts that

lacked meaning or carried no depth. His lack of care portrayed them in unforgivable ways, sexualising their Great Mothers and demonising their tricksters. The writer caricatured their shamans, depicting them as filthy, deformed beings scabbling around in caves, instead of positioning them in the highly revered roles they truly held in society.

He travelled to festivals to promote his work. When asked why they wrote in the first place, other writers professed their love for their story – but he did not seem to know. And when questioned, 'Does a writer have any responsibility?', the response he weakly proffered was, 'No, a writer must simply write.'

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Mara Menzies is an award-winning performance storyteller, having won THE STAGE award at the Edinburgh Fringe 2022 and her debut novel *Blood and Gold*; won the Saltire award for best fiction book of the year 2022. She draws on her rich dual Kenyan/Scottish cultural heritage for inspiration while crafting narratives and her passion for myth and legend, enable her to explore contemporary problems through ancient ideas. She builds worlds and invites us to enter within.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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