

## A James Nave



Creative Writing Workshop  
Paris  
December 12th 2008.

### *“RAW RITINGS”*

The day is about character creation and development. We are invited to take part in a series of exercises that prep the mind and release the flow of words on to the page. The following is what flowed on to my page without interference from the inner critic. I share them here as a salutation to James and his gift communicative artistry.

#### **Exercise:**

- We call out a few words at random.
- James puts them up in sentence form on the PB.
- We have 1 minute to write as many words as our mind cares to associate with these initial words in lists on our page.

#### **Example**

“Ocean desire knows raw steel in the birthday cake garden”

- Everyone writes down words – furiously.
- Someone calls out their list and the words are captured on PB
- .Then we all have a short time to combine these words in whatever way our imagination invites us to

#### **Result:**

*Nude sea, waffling its living way, whispering its knowledge, abandoned to its own grace, its recue lost in deep wonder, its space broken.*

#### **Exercise:**

- Walk around the room.
- James cues us with different types of walks (curl your toes in / tighten your jaw / swing your arms etc). Each body-change invokes a different character type.
- Choose one of the walks you just experimented with and write a character description.

#### **Result:**

*A non-descript character. You wouldn't notice him at all except for the occasional flicker of the eye. The knitted tie didn't quite fit the era and his jacket had a sheen to it that labelled his income in the below average bracket. His trousers were baggy and a little frayed at the hems. His shoes were polished but scuffed at the toes*

*and down at the heels. His lips were held within a tight jaw and somewhere between two oversized ears. He looked like any other gent coming out of the metro at 8 on a Monday morning except for.....*

**Exercise:**

- Write about a person you know really well and do it without using visual language

**Result:**

*I first heard his cheerful busy-ness when the doorbell sang his arrival and the door issued him into the family lounge. "Giddyay" and hugs - big - warm - wide. My brother bounced into my life at 42. The parental room was red with embarrassment and desperation while my sister placed him firmly at the head of the table - before me. His banter, chatter and gaiety rung life from a dysfunctional foursome made five.*

**Exercise:**

- Call out first names. James lists them on the PB
- Call out last names: James lists those too in a second column.
- Choose a first name and a last name and write about this character in terms of an animal. Let the characteristics of the animal inform the character.

**Result:**

*Marsha O'Hara had never been one to expose herself willingly in public. At parties she tended to slink around the outskirts of the crowd or slither unnoticed amongst the pot plants. She had little to say but when she did speak her sharp little tongue could let loose enough venom to eradicate her interlocutor from any further intercourse. Yes, and intercourse was her major problem. She never quite knew how to couple with the opposite sex. What should have been an easy slide just tended to cause confusion and made her coil inwardly at the lack of grace in her fellow bed partners. She prided herself on her sleek appearance but was aware that others found her cold and somewhat clammy to the touch. She sighed quietly mostly to herself wondering if she'd ever find another skin to slip into.*

**Exercise:**

- Choose a person you have had quite a lot of experience with.
- Choose a specific experience with that person
- Write about what you don't remember.

**Result:**

*I don't remember why we decided to run the party at her house or why Claude wanted it to be a surprise for me. I don't remember why I had chosen that day to leave the city or why I felt I had to ask her to pay me back the money she owed me. I do remember it was summer and that for the first, or was it the second, time in my life I was celebrating my birthday in summer. I was a July winter baby but here in Tehran it was mid July, and hot. Who told her it was to be a pool party and why did she choose to empty it before we arrived. I'll probably never know. I think she paid me back but I don't really know what for.*

*It was a small gathering but who they were escapes me now - a smattering of Iranians and ex-pats I expect. There was music. I can't remember her exact words and how they jarred with the melody of the night.*

#### **Learning s for me:**

- At the beginning of the workshop the first awareness I had was that the character is developed from the inside out but I found that the inside started to emerge once I had begun describing from the outside. It was almost as if the character started to take on a life of his own once I had begun to describe his outside. All I had to do was to listen to what he was telling me to write about him.
- What I thought would be a very difficult exercise which was to allow the character to be described in terms of an animal's characteristics or to write about what you don't remember about someone you know well was an extremely powerful exercise. I realised that that the power was coming from the snippets of memory laid beside all the unremembered details.
- Dialogue between characters comes from the ability to suspend the writer's own ego so that the character can be true to himself in his own words. The writer becomes his character's mouth piece.
- During the day I watched the way the characters unfolded out of each exercise as I was writing. I was writing as though a curious bystander in an emerging play of words.
- There is the Perfect Space. There is the Edit Space. There is the Imaginative Space. You engage all the spaces in their physicality, spirituality, emotionality, mentality wherein lies the story – the poetry.
- The more you get into the mess, the more you can get to the form.
- "Keep it messy!"
- Building a character requires research to get all the details into a coherent whole. The blank spaces have to be filled in coherently.

December 14<sup>th</sup> 2008.