

Text 1

I have known very few writers, but those I have known, and whom I respect, confess at once that they have little idea where they are going when they first set pen to paper. They have a character, perhaps two; they are in that condition of eager discomfort which passes for inspiration; all admit radical changes of destination once the journey has begun; one, to my certain knowledge, spent nine months on a novel about Kashmir, then reset the whole thing in the Scottish Highlands. I never heard of anyone making a 'skeleton', as we were taught at school. In the breaking and remaking, in the timing, interweaving, beginning afresh, the writer comes to discern things in his material which were not consciously in his mind when he began. This organic process, often leading to moments of extraordinary self-discovery, is of an indescribable fascination. A blurred image appears; he adds a brushstroke and another, and it is gone; but something was there, and he will not rest till he has captured it. Sometimes the yeast within a writer outlives a book he has written. I have heard of writers who read nothing but their own books; like adolescents they stand before the mirror, and still cannot fathom the exact outline of the vision before them. For the same reason, writers talk interminably about their own books, winking out hidden meanings, super-imposing new ones, begging response from those around them. Of course a writer doing this is misunderstood: he might as well try to explain a crime or a love affair. He is also, incidentally, an unforgivable bore.

This temptation to cover the distance between himself and the reader, to study his image in the sight of those who do not know him, can be his undoing: he has begun to write to please.

A young English writer made the pertinent observation a year or two back that the talent goes into the first draft, and the art into the drafts that follow. For this reason also the writer, like any other artist, has no resting place, no crowd or movement in which he may take comfort, no judgment from outside which can replace the judgment from within. A writer makes order out of the anarchy of his heart; he submits himself to a more ruthless discipline than any critic dreamed of, and when he flirts with fame, he is taking time off from living with himself, from the search for what his world contains at its inmost point.

Question :

How do professional writers ignore what they were taught at school about writing?

Text 2

Many people in industry and the Services, who have practical experience of noise, regard any investigation of this question as a waste of time; they are not prepared even to admit the possibility that noise affects people. On the other hand, those who dislike noise will sometimes use most inadequate evidence to support their pleas for a quieter society. This is a pity, because noise abatement really is a good cause, and it is likely to be discredited if it gets to be associated with bad science.

One allegation often made is that noise produces mental illness. A recent article in a weekly newspaper, for instance, was headed with a striking illustration of a lady in a state of considerable distress, with the caption 'She was yet another victim, reduced to a screaming wreck'. On turning eagerly to the text, one learns that the lady was a typist who found the sound of office typewriters worried her more and more until eventually she had to go into a mental hospital. Now the snag in this sort of anecdote is of course that one merely has a symptom? Another patient might equally well complain that her neighbours were combining to slander her and persecute her, and yet one might be cautious about believing this statement.

What is needed in case of noise is a study of large numbers of people living under noisy conditions, to discover whether they are mentally ill more often than other people are. Some time ago the United States Navy, for instance, examined a very large number of men working on aircraft carriers: the study was known as Project Anekin. It can be unpleasant to live even several miles from an aerodrome; if you think what it must be like to share the deck of a ship with several squadrons of jet aircraft, you will realize that a modern navy is a good place to study noise. But neither psychiatric interviews nor objective tests were able to show any effects upon these American sailors. This result merely confirms earlier American and British studies: if there is any effect of noise upon mental health, it must be so small that present methods of psychiatric diagnosis cannot find it. That does not prove that it does exist: but it does mean that noise is less dangerous than, say, being brought up in an orphanage -- which really is a mental health hazard.

Question:

What conclusion does the author draw about noise and health in this piece?

Text 3

No two sorts of birds practice quite the same sort of flight; the varieties are infinite; but two classes may be roughly seen. Any ship that crosses the Pacific is accompanied for many days by the smaller albatross, which may keep company with the vessel for an hour without visible or more than occasional movement of wing. The currents of air that the walls of the ship direct upwards, as well as in the line of its course, are enough to give the great bird with its immense wings sufficient sustenance and progress. The albatross is the king of the gliders, the class of fliers which harness the air to their purpose, but must yield to its opposition. In the contrary school, the duck is supreme. It comes nearer to the engines with which man has 'conquered' the air, as he boasts. Duck, and like them the pigeons, are endowed with such-like muscles, that are a good part of the weight of the bird, and these will play the short wings with such irresistible power that they can bore for long distances through an opposing gale before exhaustion follows. Their humbler followers, such as partridges, have a like power of strong propulsion, but soon tire. You may pick them up in utter exhaustion, if wind over the sea has driven them to a long journey. The swallow shares the virtues of both schools in highest measure. It tires not, nor does it boast of its power; but belongs to the air, travelling it may be six thousand miles to and from its northern nesting home, feeding its flown young as it flies, and slipping through we no longer take omens from their flight on this side and that; and even the most superstitious villagers no longer take off their hats to the magpie and wish it good-morning.

Question:

What are the two main types of bird flight described by the author?