**How and why might a creative writer benefit from focusing on process rather than product?**

If the arts are truly the "corollary to the immune system" as Barry (2005) suggests, an idea borne out by evolutionary biology (Boyd, 2009) and psychological research by Pennebaker (1997) and Cangelosi and Schaefer (1992), then it is in the process of creativity rather than the final outcome that this must take place.

Art is universally central to human behaviour and culture. Boyd (2009) writes that the act of creativity and the benefit of the process is embedded in our biological evolution. Humans experience similar emotions to what we witness using mirror neurons, which "fire when we perceive someone performing an action, as [...] if we were performing it ourselves" (p.192). Like when reading fiction, creativity increases "Our vicarious experience and behavioural options… It allows us to learn possible opportunities and risks, and the stratagems and emotional resources needed to cope with inevitable setbacks, without subjecting ourselves to actual risk." (p.193) Adapting to new scenarios made humans a dominant species.

As a by-product of humanity's continued survival, humans developed storytelling as an evolutionary adaptation to spread knowledge. Carroll (2009) cites Wilson (1949), "We are a linguistically adept story-telling species because telling stories is one of the chief ways we give shape to our experience and thus ultimately direct our behaviour." We learn, like in fables, how to behave in the wider world – this evolutionary adaptation ensured survival in the Pleistocene age, evolving humans into the hunter rather than hunted. Like evolution, storytelling continues to learn and adapt – an ongoing work in progress with no endpoint. Evolutionary biology exhibits how the experience of the process teaches an individual far more than a final product can.

Freewriting, to write non-stop, without self-judgement or editing, benefits a creative writer as it immediately outlines the process as essential, not the final product. When freewriting, Elbow (1989) says, "I feel most myself", noticing, "by letting myself rave, I […] catch a glimpse I hadn't had before of the crucial pattern in my inner life…" The writing does not need to have a purpose, it is solely for the individual. Elbow (1973) states, "A rambling process [...] is really efficient since [...] you can work up to what you really want to say and how to say it." Knowing that freewriting will not be shared gives the writer the freedom of self-discovery. This live journey can process suppressed emotions and thoughts, improving the mental state of creative writers.

Lynda Barry believes the biological function of the arts is "the corollary to our immune system." Noted in Accessing The Imaginary (2013), "We wouldn't have [...] the arts, through all of our evolutionary stages, if it didn't have some biological function. […] There are so many experiences that we can't think our way out of, and the only way [...] is to see our experience reflected." Like Boyd observes, art, in whatever form, activates the mirror neurons in the brain, processing safely internally. Barry also says that focusing on the final product hinders the process, as self-consciousness causes anxiety and distraction. In What It Is (2013), she pursues "only good drawings. While I drew, my main feelings were doubt and worry, and when I finished my only feelings were relief and regret. I never drew for fun anymore." This perfectionist emphasis on the final product is a heavy weight, killing positive emotions created by process. By focusing on process instead, art can artistically benefit a creative writer.

The benefit of the process is also supported by psychological research from Pennebaker et al. (1997), demonstrating "When college students have the regular opportunity to write about [...] their lives, their immune systems… improve." (Runco, 2007). Theorists Ochse (1990) and Storr (1988) argue "creativity provides a means for fulfilling unconscious needs or resolving psychological conflicts." While final products are often submitted to the judgement of others, the process is an intimate and personal one. Research shows that the process creates positive emotion and improves overall health, benefitting the creative writer.

Cangelosi and Schaefer (1992) conducted a 25-year study of highly creative women. Displaying a pattern across this lengthy time scale, the study "Identified three underlying psychological needs that […] drive these women's creative activities: self-understanding, personal order and control, and emotional regulation." Throughout my own zine-making, I found the process a cathartic experience, as it freed me to explore my creativity.

In a world with growing uncertainty, biological evolution, creative practices, and psychological research exhibit how, for the creative writer, focusing on the process is far more beneficial than the product.

*Word Count – 750*

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