Novel and play 16

Tina Howe: “All the events are true, but none of them ever happened.”

What’s the danger in hewing too much to actual facts, when you write about your own experience or trying to be too factual when working with some external materials?

What language should we use when writing about historical personages?

In real life a friend can drop by for no good reasons, but why should this not happen in a play?

Other people’s privacy?

Psychological danger

Your own viewpoint, special way of analyzing, understanding, and dramatizing count

On invention, character, and relationship:

Tell me things about your pet. The only requirement is that this must be a pet you have never owned. It can be anything from a kitten to a dinosaur, from a fly to a dragon. Describe what your pet looks like, how you acquired it, what it eats and where it sleeps, what tricks it can do, and how it gets on with your family, friends, neighbors, or the people at work.

On enemy:

Give us a scene that brings to fictional life someone you hate. Make us hate him/her. It might be someone who annoys you—someone whose manner you cannot stand. Or it might be someone who has offended you or done you some harm, or someone to whom you have done some harm—there are many reasons to hate people.

Think in concrete terms: (when writing your play or novel, always think in concrete terms)

Make this abstractions come to life by rendering them in specific details. For example, to show “racism,” you can have A refer to others as “you people”.

Poverty/growing old/evil

How we shape our stories that we tell to each other according to the listener:

You have just come out of the movie theater around nine in the evening and you are mugged—a person asks for your money, then knocks you to the ground before running away. Pretend you are telling the account of this event to different people:

Your mother

Your best friend

Your boyfriend or girlfriend

A police officer

Writing from life

**Emotional connections and hazards**

Writing from a source

**Dangers of fact**

UNATTAINABLE

By Wendy Brodsky

THE SETTING is a split stage. Each side shows a bedroom of a teenaged female with a bed, a phone, and a full-length mirror. On one side, LIZ sits on her bed with an open magazine in her lap and a phone to her ear. She is a thin, pretty girl. Her eyes are focused on the mirror as she examines rolls of skin produced by her sitting crosslegged. In the other room, BECKY lies on the floor holding the phone to her ear with her shoulder. She is similar to LIZ, but a little heavier. She is struggling with her legs in the air in a contorted position. After a moment BECKY lets out a moan and readjusts the phone.

BECKY

Uh, Liz, are you sure this is how they say to do it, ’cause, uh, it’s really pretty painful and I can’t imagine they think my body would do this on purpose.

LIZ

(Glances from the mirror to the magazine.)

Yeah, I’m sure. And it’s not that painful. Let’s just hold it the full five minutes and see how we feel. It’s supposed to be the best toning exercise around. Just think about how good we’ll look.

BECKY

Yeah, and how much we’re gonna hurt tomorrow morning when we wake up. If we wake up.

(BECKY’s legs start to drop. Her face is clenched as she continues the exercise.)

I can’t be doing this right. I’m stopping. I don’t care how toned it’s gonna make my butt.

(BECKY pulls her legs to her chest, breaking the exercise.)

LIZ

Wimp. You only had a few more seconds. I guess it’s just not as important to you as it is to me.

BECKY

Guess not.

LIZ

(Still seated on the bed, LIZ looks again at the magazine and pretends to be out of breath.)

Fifty-five, fifty-six, fifth-seven, fifth-eight, fifth-nine, five minutes. Ah, that feels good. Okay, are you ready to try the next one?

BECKY

(Lying on the floor.)

Naw, I don’t think so.

LIZ

How come?

BECKY

I just don’t want to, okay? It hurts.

LIZ

Whatever. But I’m gonna try the next exercise.

BECKY

Go ahead. Do you want me to talk to you while you do it?

LIZ

Actually, it’s pretty distracting. Maybe you should just go.

BECKY

I probably should anyway. My mom’s been calling me to dinner for, like, the last half hour.

LIZ

I thought you swore off eating until after the dance.

BECKY

(BECKY gets up. It requires more energy than she expected, and she immediately sits on the bed.)

Yeah, I did, but I’ve got to at least pretend or she’ll never leave me alone.

LIZ

Yeah, I know what you mean. My mom’s the same way.

(LIZ walks to the mirror. She runs her hand across her face and down over her stomach and thighs.)

So. . . I’ll talk to you later.

BECKY

Yeah, sure. Are you okay? You seem, I don’t know, upset or something.

LIZ

I’m fine. I just. . .

(Turning and examining her profile in the mirror.)

Do you ever wonder what your body looks like to other people? I mean, like, how much cellulite they see that you never even noticed before?

BECKY

That’s why I try to avoid mirrors and nakedness at the same time. You gonna do the next exercise?

LIZ

Yeah, in a minute. But I don’t know why I even bother. It’s not like they help anything.

BECKY

That’s precisely why I quit. I need faster results. Liz?

(LIZ frowns and steps back from the mirror.)

LIZ?

LIZ

Huh? Yeah.

BECKY

You sure you’re all right?

LIZ

I’m fine, Becky. Go eat your dinner.

BECKY

I told you, I’m not eating. I’m just, you know, going down there.

LIZ

(LIZ lifts her shirt and examines her stomach. She grabs whatever skin she can and pinches it in her hand. She turns away in disgust and looks to the magazine on her bed.)

Yeah. Me neither.

BECKY

(BECKY moves to the door while LIZ returns to her bed. BECKY moves with normal energy while LIZ drags, her body hunched over.)

But, like, I don’t want my mom to get mad.

LIZ

Oh, no. Definitely don’t want that.

BECKY

So, uh, I guess I’ll go downstairs, just, you know, to put in an appearance.

(LIZ picks up the magazine and tears out a handful of pages, crunches them into little balls and throws them at the mirror. BECKY hears the noise through the phone.)

What are you doing?

LIZ

I was just, uh, tearing out the exercises so I could see them better, all at once, instead of having to, like, turn the pages.

BECKY

Oh. You still gonna do some more?

LIZ

Of course. Why wouldn’t I?

BECKY

I dunno. I just thought maybe. . . Well, I’m going now.

LIZ

Okay. I’ll talk to you later.

BECKY

Yeah, see ya.

(Both girls hang up their phones. BECKY carefully places hers, but LIZ simply drops hers to the ground. On the way out of her room, BECKY pauses briefly to glance at herself in the mirror. Then, with a shrug and little laugh, she EXITS. Meanwhile, LIZ looks at the scattered magazine pages. She sits on the floor, picks up a page, and unravels it. She stares at it, then tears the page in half. She lets the pieces drop and then buries her head in her hands just as we see BECKY’s door close.)

THE END

About questions

Lou: So what happened?

Angie (opening mail): Nothing happened. What is this, 469 dollars from Semprini Plumbing?

Lou: They fixed the toilets in the women’s john. So what did he do?

Angie: Nothing! Forget it! I thought Semprini owed you a favor.