

From *The Writer on Her Work: New Essays in New Territory*

“I write out of a sense of guilt. I believe in guilt. There’s not enough guilt to go around these days for my taste.” **Joy Williams**

“Since my first novel *Ellen Foster* was published I’ve read many articles about my own supposed Cinderella story: student shows thirty pages of a manuscript to her teacher who turns out to be a publisher and so on and they all live happily ever after. This often sounds more like an accusation than a celebration. Nobody saw me paying the worst sort of price typically associated with getting a first novel published and noticed. I’ve never enjoyed the company of people who believe that by living a “writerly” life, complete with rejection notices papering the walls, the writing will follow. Dues payments are not self-conscious acts. I’ve never believed anyone can will the mind to create a thing of beauty. I like to think artistic creation starts in a more mysterious place, somewhere deep within, probably somewhere way far back in one’s past.” **Kaye Gibbons**

“My horoscope, cast by a neighborhood astrologer when I was a week-old infant, predicted that I would be a writer, that I would win some prizes, that I would cross ‘the black waters’ of oceans and make my home among aliens. Brought up in a culture that places its faith in horoscopes, it never occurred to me to doubt it. The astrologer meant to offer me a melancholy future; to be destined to leave India was to be banished from the sources of true culture. The nuns at school, on the other hand, insinuated that India had long outlived its glories, and that if we wanted to be educated, modern women and make something of our lives, we’d better hit the trail westward. All my girlhood, I straddled the seesaw of contradictions. *Bilayat*, meaning the scary, unknown ‘abroad,’ was both boom time and desperate loss.” **Bharati Mukherjee**

“I believe the fount of art to be beyond gender, just as I believe the human soul itself to be housed in a particular physique merely for practical purposes of reproduction — slotted along the continuum that is, in my view, the true measure of sex. The so-called

war between the sexes seems to me a trumped-up conflict, presently to be resolved: and I suspect that the very distinction between masculine and feminine will one day be of purely functional significance.” **Jan Morris (formerly James Morris)**

“As an Indian woman, I come from a long history of people who have listened to the language of this continent, people who have known that corn grows with the songs and prayers of the people, that it has a story to tell, that the world is alive. . . .This intuitive and common language is what I seek for my writing, work in touch with the mystery and force of life, work that speaks a few of the many voices around us.” **Linda Hogan**

“To write in Latin America has a different meaning than it has in the United States or Europe. I suppose the same happens in Africa. Latin America invades, possesses, interferes, gets into the smallest crack. Latin America is always out there, behind the window, watching, spying, ready to jump. The street enters through the door, people find their way in, look at you while you are sleeping, eating, or making love. The path is public.” **Elena Poniatowska**

“. . . you have to realize that you cannot hope to console yourself for your grief by writing. You cannot deceive yourself by hoping for caresses and lullabies from your vocation.” **Natalia Ginzberg**

“I had a little sign in my kitchen then: ‘Whatever keeps you from doing your work has become your work.’ This was to encourage me to understand that if I were going to write poetry, I could not expect from myself immaculate closets.” **Carolyn Forché**

“Sometimes while writing, I have to get up to dance, to celebrate the flow of energy transforming itself into words. Sometimes the energy becomes words that are not printed, not even with the delicate line of a fountain pen, which is the most voluptuous in the act of writing. You must always celebrate when — whether in a cafe or subway — a happy combination of words, a fortuitous allusion, elicits associations that unwind the mental thread of writing without a mark. The mark comes next. And I will do my best to retain the freshness of that first moment of awe and transformation.” **Luisa Valenzuela**