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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

Throughout all my writing years I have been aware of one intention only, I suppose, and that is to try to recapture for myself certain moments, incidents, events that have at the time acted as some kind of emotional impetus. Writing about them seemed to give a permanence. Others might read what I had seen or felt and be affected too. This is what I hoped. But primarily writing is a form of self-indulgence. I admit readily that as I wrote, the shape or outline of the captive moment changed. There's the pity! Never was I able to recapture in its first innocence that primary stimulus. The very nature of fiction writing affected whatever I touched. Other characters intruded. Dialogue sharpened or blunted what had appeared to me as entire in itself.

THEA ASTLEY



Thea Astley was born in Queensland in 1925. She is without doubt one of Australia's major writers and has won, on more than one occasion, most of Australia's most prestigious literary awards. She is a lively social satirist and very often she has directed her satirical, sometimes moralistic gaze at the pettiness of small-town philistinism. Very often her works, e.g. *The Acolyte* and *A Kindness Cup*, take opposite tacks in their exploration of conscience muscled away by mob-mentality and the resultant horror of that sacrifice. One of her latest novels, and I personally find one of her best is *It's Raining in Mango* in which she, focusing on four generations of her own personal history also focuses on Australia's own history. *Coda* is an extract from her latest novel published in 1994.

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Throughout all my writing years I have been aware of one intention only, I suppose, and that is to try to recapture for myself certain moments, incidents, events that have at the time acted as some kind of emotional impetus. Writing about them seemed to give a permanence. Others might read what I had seen or felt and be affected too. This is what I hoped. But primarily writing is a form of self-indulgence. I admit readily that as I wrote, the shape or outline of the captive moment changed. There's the pity! Never was I able to recapture in its first innocence that primary stimulus. The very nature of fiction writing affected whatever I touched. Other characters intruded. Dialogue sharpened or blunted what had appeared to me as entire in itself.

I have always been interested in the misfit, the outsider, the less than successful. That is why several of my novels or stories deal with blacks or half-castes, with adolescents or 'failures' in the world's sense of the term. When I was writing *Beachmasters* about the Jimmy Steven's revolution in Santo, the most northern island of the then New Hebrides, I was moved more by Steven's failure to secede than the plight of 'colour' inside the stuffy rituals of white colonialism. When I wrote about the blacks of north Queensland in *Hunting the White Pineapple* and *It's Raining in Mango* I drew on those whom I had known living in the tiny settlement across the river from our house. But what the non-writer cannot seem to understand is that my stories were not photographs of people as I knew them in deadly accuracy, but sketches of an aggregate of what I had read of local history, of what I saw and what I heard: writing is an exercise in photography – but the developing fluid is feeling.