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Wedding Toasts & Character Roasts

by [BLOGGER Jill_Dearman](#) on 06-04-2009 01:01 PM - last edited on 06-22-2009 01:19 PM by [ADMIN PaulH](#)

It's June and wedding season is officially in high gear. The weekend before last I gave a toast at a dear friend's wedding, and this coming weekend I shall be doing it again. It seems as if the secret to toast-making is preparation mixed with spontaneity. Not so different from the writing process. In worrying over being perfect, I found myself constructing a stiff and stilted story that felt contrived and irritating. My partner gave me great advice: "keep it short."

Since she was able to keep her advice so concise I thought I should be able to do the same with this toast! Soon the words flowed out of me and my editor's eye cut 'em down. When the time came to deliver the goods, I took my notes up with me but did not refer to them once. Instead I tried to connect with the brides (yes, it's also Gay Pride Month and here come the Brides -- both of them!), in this case the lovely Hope and Eva. (Maya and Deb are up next!)

In thinking about weddings, a schmaltzy, sentimental and soulful subject, I was brought back to a story by one of my favorite writers, Delmore Schwartz. Schwartz was more of a philosopher than a romantic, and more than any other writer I can think of, he really managed to address in his fiction the "generation gap" between the young New York intellectuals of his set, and their coarse, practical immigrant parents. You read his stories and it's hard not to empathize with both sides. And a wedding is nothing if not a gathering of the generations of the two sides of the union.

"The World is a Wedding", included in the Schwartz story collection "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" is set during the Great Depression in the apartment of young playwright Rudyard and his lonely sister Laura. The story touches upon beginnings and endings, graduations and entrée into the real world, life and death. And it won't give anything away to say that this gem of a tale ends with some schmaltzy borscht belt humor when Laura quips, "Let your conscience be your bride."

But if the world is a wedding, what happens after the knot is tied? Renowned essayist Phillip Lopate recently published "Two Marriages." With clarity and depth he explores the title subject in the elegant form of two novellas.

In the spirit of the season ...

This week's exercise for key-bangers:

Imagine one of your characters giving a toast at a loved one's wedding. Write it not just as a piece of written text, but actually read it aloud and see if you could imagine he or she performing the act of delivering the toast. If you are feeling warmed up after that try having another character "roast" your protagonist. What series of funny insults in the spirit of celebrating your main character might come up? Lift your glass and begin.

Report back and let me know if trying something less writerly helps you to see your characters in a new way. And keep banging ze keys: <http://www.bangthekeys.com/>

Check out my book, Bang the Keys!

Message Edited by PaulH on 06-22-2009 01:19 PM

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by [Zoola](#) on 06-04-2009 02:07 PM

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Who introduced you to reading? RIZZO'S WAR author Lou Manfredo thanks his dad. <http://bit.ly/1RZHRM> about 6 hours ago

A fantasy world where people's souls go down a spirit stream and end up on Earth when they

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I had a similar case of "toast-writer's block" a bunch of years ago. Finally was able to put the pressure aside and write what I thought was a great toast (and everyone seemed to love it.) Unfortunately my friend's marriage ended only one year later. Nothing to do with my writing, I hope! Anyway, I love the idea for this exercise. Putting one of my characters in that type of position promises to be truly revealing.

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by [BLOGGER: Jill_Dearman](#) on 06-04-2009 02:53 PM

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Art imitates life and life imitates art. Keep toasting, Zoola! And thx for the comment. Jill

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0

by [Jaycess_reads](#) on 06-05-2009 07:32 AM

Options

Finally!

Mix your sources! Schmaltzy borscht belt humor + lesbian wedding + your incredible wit = guests bawling from laughter and joy.

Break a leg!

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1

by [lovechild](#) on 06-05-2009 08:59 AM

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Your timing couldn't be better. Working on a toast/speech for our 25th anniversary next weekend has been excruciating. Read your post and chucked it all - very liberating! Now I've got a line or two of notes and the rest will come... Thanks for the fearless advice.

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by [BLOGGER: Jill_Dearman](#) on 06-05-2009 10:02 AM

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Mazel Tov!

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by [starrXX](#) on 06-05-2009 12:50 PM

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I did a toast at a wedding last summer here in California for a couple who had been together for a quarter of a century. The miracle was finally getting equal justice under law, a saying engraved across the Supreme Court building. Now our state court says otherwise, but those who got married las summer are still legally married but new couples can't get married. Makes a lot of sense, what?

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by [BLOGGER: Jill_Dearman](#) on 06-05-2009 01:00 PM

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I put art above the law!

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Stop by and chat with Debbie Macomber. <http://bit.ly/sgTVQ1> day ago

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