

Method Writing

Creating realistic characters for me is like method acting, at least as that approach is popularly understood. The idea is actors find their own real life memories and emotions that match what the character they are portraying experiences. To say I do that with my characters is a bit overstated. But like method actors, I occasionally do try to find something in myself that can help me understand what my characters are feeling. I can at times find some part of myself, some aspect of my personality, in a character and build on that trait, often exaggerate it so it is dominant in my character's personality. That is, one trait that I possess in some minor way comes to embody the particular character. It is not always deliberate. Sometimes I discover it has happened after I have written a scene. Sometimes the whole experience for me is unconscious and only realized after the fact. And once I find it, I can lend more realism to the book by utilizing my own experience

At other times though, it is purposeful. For example, I'll have a character who is self-centered and angry. Then I'll search for that aspect of my own personality and write my own emotions and behavior into the character. I am not alone in this approach. Other writers have actually called it "Method Writing." The term seems to have a slightly different meaning than my version. It is used to describe immersing oneself as much as possible in the experience and behavior of a fictional character. So for example, if your protagonist is a boxer, you as the writer, might actually take up boxing, the idea being you will more realistically portray your boxer character. That seems a bit much and not quite what I mean.

Simply put, I often ascribe different parts of my own personality to my characters. In my book *Empty Luck*, there are five important male characters, all in their late 20s or early 30s. They are different from one another - one is quite hedonistic, a second is careful and intellectual, a third, a selfish sociopath, another is very attuned to rules and authority, and the fifth has an addictive personality. All, for better or worse, are reflective of components of my makeup, of aspects of my own personality. The traits of the characters are then heightened to various degrees to make each distinctive and hopefully still believable. And that believability, that realism, is enhanced by finding some aspect of each character in some small way, in my own personality.