

Issue 4 -
May 2023

THE INK DRINKER



Foreword

Alice Kay-Wood

Ah, beginnings. They are a time for fresh starts and renewed hopes, and with them comes the warm, golden belief that the future holds new, undiscovered lands rich with yet-to-be-fulfilled promise. Springtime is teeming with this sense of new life; it is this renewal that bounces the world back into motion after the cold Winter months. It is that beautiful time of year where blossom floats down onto blooming flowers and the natural world rises to its feet, radiant in rich greens, sunshine yellows and bubblegum pinks. The beauty and strength of the natural world's flora is explored in Tabitha's gorgeous poem on page 26. We also have a beautiful poem called *Just to Feel the Sun Again* by Mimi on page 24 and another called *Newfound Freedom* by Brad on page 25.

Of course, Spring is not the only beginning. Every novel, novella and short story has its very own beginning. These beginnings are of vital importance; a dull opening may bore a reader to such an extent that the second page never receives a single glance. In the interest of capturing a reader's attention, writers often choose to begin their written works in medias res, as Kaci discusses on page 20. On page 14, Alex explores the effect of Fitzgerald's opening of *The Great Gatsby* (while trying to reserve judgement in accordance with explicit instruction from Nick Carraway's father). Jenny has selected a book called *The Crimson Petal and the White* (page 18), which has such an intriguing beginning that I've absolutely got to read it this summer. Sophia examines the prologue to *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai, and its important role in establishing the core themes of the novel, on page 16. Tabitha looks to the Bible, on page 5, in search of the very beginning of the female archetypes that we still see in modern literature today, while Ash discusses the opening lines from various pieces of ancient literature, on page 4. Speaking about opening lines, on page 8, I'll be taking another wander through the fairy tale forest, and I'll explore alternative fairy tale openings, for when you're bored of 'once upon a time'. If you want to get involved, Ruby's got some advice on how to begin your own story on page 27.

Some works of literature don't just have memorable openings, but their entire plots revolve around new beginnings as well. On page 11, Abby will give you some wonderful reading recommendations of books centring on this theme. Lizzie reminds us, on page 22, not to

despair over endings, since endings, in a way, are beginnings too. In that lies a sort of melancholy hope; when one thing ends, no matter how beautiful that thing was, another will begin in its place.

I am almost done with my beginning to the fourth edition of *The Ink Drinker*. I very much hope you enjoy the articles, poetry, and new Spot the Difference (appearing on page 29) that you will find in these pages. When you've finished reading, don't despair; the end makes way for a new beginning, after all. The next issue of *The Ink Drinker* is glowing on the horizon. Spring will soon turn to Summer, and Summer will soon turn to Autumn... So, while you start to wrap up warm again and watch the green leaves transform into fiery reds, golden yellows and pumpkin oranges, you may be inspired to begin an autumnal piece ready for the fifth edition of *The Ink Drinker*.



Why Have Them? The Importance of Beginnings in Ancient Literature

Ash Benstead

The beginning of a story is its most crucial element as it does many things from hooking a reader or audience in to paving the way for how events will unfold. An author — whether it be a poet or playwright — may have a whimsical and captivating story and writing style but it is, without a doubt, incomplete without a beginning.

To start with, if we take ancient literature as an example, such as Homer's *The Iliad*, an epic about the Trojan War, which starts with: "Anger — sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that accursed anger, which brought the Greeks endless suffering". This both gives an insight into one of the characters — Achilles — and what the poem is essentially about, or at least the start of it. Without this beginning, it would leave so many unanswered questions: why are the Greeks suffering? What happened to them? Other epic poems are similar to *The Iliad* in that they enter with 'Sing, goddess' or 'Sing, muse' as it was an important oratory device, as all epic poems would have been performed for an audience. As well as this, it invokes a divine element to the poem as it was a time in which the hellenic gods were much revered — Homer himself writing in around the 8th or 7th century BCE.

Other examples of ancient literature with strong beginnings include Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which included many poems, spread out over fifteen books. Within these books, Ovid showcases many myths including Orpheus and Eurydice, Minerva and Arachne (or Athena and Arachne) and Daphne and Apollo. If we take the poem *Daphne and Apollo*, Ovid starts with the first two lines: "Peneian Daphne was the first where Phoebus [Apollo] set his love / Which not blind chance but Cupid's fierce and cruel wrath did move". These two lines essentially set out and pave the way for the myth: Apollo boasted about his archery skills to the chagrin of Cupid (or Greek Eros), who shot one of his arrows of love (or lust) at Apollo, and a second lead-filled arrow shot at the nymph, Daphne. This then led to Apollo pursuing Daphne and Daphne, as she was devoted to Artemis and thus in keeping her virginity, fled to her father, Peneus, who turned her into a laurel tree upon her request. The point being, there would not be too much to this story aside from a lusting god if it was not for the fact that Apollo offended Cupid. Thus, without beginnings, a story or tale loses a large chunk of its meaning.

The Temptress, The Prostitute and The Virgin Mother: the biblical beginnings of women in literature

Tabitha Diack

As perhaps the ultimate collection of literature, whether factual or not, the Bible left us with three key depictions for women: the three archetypes thus set up for all following female characters. Eve, who tempted Adam and thus falls responsible for all human sin. Mary Magdalene, the woman tarnished by sin only God may forgive. And The Virgin Mary, sinless and pure in her virginal birth of our saviour.

In other words: The Temptress, The Prostitute and The Virgin Mother. Quite the variety.

As the model, the template, this biblical recount of women seemingly leaves little depth available to the female characters who would begin to emerge throughout history. Have we reached beyond it, or will women in literature continue to be fettered by these three key roles?

THE TEMPTRESS



Eve: the temptress, the original female villain who birthed thousands of female characters held equally morally accountable.

Daisy Buchanan: the superficial woman, the catalyst to Jay Gatsby's downfall, the beautiful temptress. Upon first glance, as a female character, Daisy appears to be entirely skin deep, having tempted Gatsby so that he devoted his life to her but then ultimately leaving him to die. In her infinite beauty and charisma, is Daisy the contemporary epitome of the temptress who tempted Gatsby down a path that would ultimately lead him to damnation? Or rather is she simply a beautiful woman trying to stay afloat in an unforgiving patriarchal world?

Bertha Mason: from the deceitful temptress to the madwoman in the attic. Renowned for her beauty, she tempts Rochester, concealing her mental ailments from him before ultimately becoming the tyrannical obstacle to his and Jane's happiness. The lovely Jane tormented by the temptress Bertha. Is she too an Eve who tempted her Adam? Or not another example of the failings of a patriarchal society and the mental care it offered women?

It is in these women that we see the modern renditions of Eve, who too fell victim to a world built for men, tempted herself by a male snake.

THE VIRGIN MOTHER



Entirely unattainable, naturally The Virgin Mother has become the universal expectation for women across literature: the idyllic archetype, what we both ought to and yet cannot possibly be.

Her legacy remains in those fragrantly naïve female characters we too often come across – chained to convention. May Welland for one, manufactured with a 'factitious purity', radiant in her ignorance and stunted from ever fulfilling the intellectual potential within.

One of many in an unbroken line of female characters built in the image of this unattainable purity.

THE PROSTITUTE



That leaves the prostitute. The prostitute who is reflected in every female character who falls into desire of any kind, any woman who dares to reach beyond the self-sacrificial expectation for what she herself truly wants. Perhaps what was the selling of one's body in The Bible has

settled into literature as rather an unapologetic reclaiming of it – and in doing so sacrificing the pure and passive ideal in a ‘sinful’ manner.

Or perhaps it’s the opposite. Perhaps we see prostitution in every female character who sacrifices her autonomy for security: her body in exchange for her safety. Prostitution thus becomes the necessary act for women in literature. Daisy tying herself to Tom regardless of his extramarital endeavours, Catherine Earnshaw marrying the respectable Edgar Linton when her heart lies with Heathcliff.

Perhaps prostitution has manifested as the selling of the self for female characters: giving up a part of themselves for security as Mary Magdalene gave herself to Jesus for eternal salvation.

Perhaps The Virgin Mary has become every female character reduced to their objective purity, as she is reduced to the mother of Christ.

Perhaps Eve lives on in every woman demonised for no fault of her own.

We are still talking about literature,
right?

Beyond ‘Once Upon a Time’: The Forgotten First Words of the Fairy Tale World

Alice Kay-Wood

Once upon a time in the middle of winter, when the flakes of snow were falling like feathers from the sky, a queen sat at a window sewing, and the frame of the window was made of black ebony. And while she was sewing and looking out of the window at the snow, she pricked her finger with the needle, and three drops of blood fell upon the snow. And the red looked pretty upon the white snow, and she thought to herself, “If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame.”

This is the opening to *Little Snow White* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, specifically from the seventh edition of their book, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales)*, published in 1857. It’s been translated, duh, into English. A few translations had been attempted, but they were all a bit, well... rubbish. But fortunately, good old Margaret Hunt gave us a faithful translation in 1884. As you can see, those four famous words, ‘Once upon a time’, are right there, starting this classic fairy tale off in the most classic way. This beginning has buried itself so deeply into the human psyche, that it can often seem impossible that a fairy tale could possibly start in any other way. Surely, it’s that magical “Once upon a time” that makes a fairy tale a fairy tale. This is certainly not the case. In fact, most of the tales in Grimms’ collection don’t start this way. It crops up here and there, but it’s not the marking feature of a tale.

While this snippet is from the Grimms, don’t forget there are other fairy tale collectors too – and there are a *lot* of them. A common misunderstanding is that the Grimm Brothers were the first to write down fairy tales... which is completely wrong. There were lots of people recording them before the brothers were born. Another thing that silly people think is that the Grimms wrote the tales and are their authentic authors, like Charlotte Bronte with *Jane Eyre* or Daphne du Maurier with *Rebecca*... which is so utterly wrong that it borders on lunacy. The Grimms were simply one of the first to attempt to record the real stories that ordinary folk were telling, without making it all fancy (looking at you, Charles Perrault).

However, despite their pure intentions, they are a little guilty of beautifying the language before sending it to print. By looking at previous drafts of the tales, we can see the changes

that Wilhelm made. Let's look at the tale that begins the collection; it's called *The Frog King*. In 1810, the entire tale was just a paragraph long, and started with "The king's daughter went out into the forest...". (We agree with you, Wilhelm, it is a bit boring.) He jazzed it up a bit in 1812 and wrote "There was once a king's daughter...". (Good job, Wilhelm.) He soon changed his mind though and now the story starts thus: "In the olden days, when wishing still worked, there lived a king whose daughters were all beautiful, but the youngest daughter was so lovely that even the sun... was struck with wonder...". (Okay, Wilhelm, no need to show off.)

What I love about this opening is that lovely "when wishing still worked" part. It really sets up a magical atmosphere and it's such a shame that this beautiful line of Wilhelm's invention hasn't stood the test of time. "In the olden days", or phrases along those lines, are used by Wilhelm a lot in his collection, and may or may not have been used now and again by the real German people telling these stories (storytelling was originally purely oral, not written down and read – you're *telling* a story, after all). *Death's Messengers* starts with "In ancient times..." and *The Sleeping Beauty* opens with "A long time ago", with *The Moon* starting off with "In days gone by". These all have something in common: a very obvious vagueness. It communicates to a listener or reader that this tale is set a long time ago, but doesn't say anything more than that. This is exactly what "Once upon a time" does too (but Wilhelm certainly didn't make this one up; fairy tale writers had been using it for centuries). This is one of the things that *makes* a fairy tale: the sense that the story happened at some undistinguished point in some blurry past, in a magical world that is far, far away. It's one of the reasons why my favourite version of *Snow White, Richilda*, is often not considered a fairy tale at all, because it is set in a specific place at a specific time.

While "Once upon a time" only appears from time to time, "once" is a fairy tale favourite. The vast majority of Grimms' tales start with this formula: "There was once a ... who ...". If you start a story like this, it will certainly carry the whimsical tenor of a fairy tale. "Once" is a brilliant word because it gives you absolutely no information at all. This is just perfect for a story that has no time, date or location. The wonderful *Snow White and Rose Red* begins with "There was once a poor widow who lived in a lonely cottage." *Frau Trude* opens with "There was once a little girl who was obstinate and inquisitive", which is never a good idea for fairy tale protagonists. Spoiler - she gets turned into a piece of wood and thrown on the fire. Oops. One tale starts "There was once a woman who had three daughters, the eldest of whom was called One-eye, because she had only one eye... and the second, Two-eyes, because she had

two eyes like other folks, and the youngest, Three-eyes, because she had three eyes”. Shockingly, it’s called *One-eye, Two-eyes, and Three-eyes*.

Another classic keyword found in fairy tale opening lines is “certain”. Once again, it makes everything vague. *The Three Sluggards* starts with “A certain King...”, *The Giant and the Tailor* begins with “A certain tailor who was great at boasting but ill at doing [anything]...” and *The Lazy Spinner* starts with “In a certain village there once lived a man and his wife, and the wife was so idle that she would never work at anything; whatever her husband gave her to spin, she did not get done, and what she did spin she did not wind, but let it all remain entangled in a heap.”

My favourite beginnings, however, are ones that are so honest about the fact that the tale is made for being told aloud, and directly address the people listening to the story. While we’re often unsure whether or not many fairy tale opening lines were actually spoken by the general public or were created by the people who recorded them to add a bit more sparkle, it’s pretty safe to say that these openings are proper stuff spoken by proper oral storytellers. *The Ditmarsch Tale of Lies* starts beautifully simply: “I will tell you something.” Whoever used to tell *The Hare and the Hedgehog* gave a little bit of backstory: “This story, my dear young folks, seems to be false, but it really is true, for my grandfather, from whom I have it, used always, when relating it, to say complacently, “It must be true, my son, or else no one could tell it to you.” The story is as follows.” In the opening of *The Griffin*, the storyteller admits gaps in their knowledge: “There was once upon a time a King, but where he reigned and what he was called, I do not know.” The storyteller of *The Old Beggar Woman* starts off with a classic “There was once a...” structure, and then decides there’s no need to describe things that everyone already knows about: “There was once an old woman, but you have surely seen an old woman go begging before now? This woman begged the same way...”

So, all in all – “Once upon a time” isn’t used as often as we think. There’s loads of other ways of starting your fairy tale, whether it’s a classic structure or some sort of recognition of your audience. Lots of tales bypass a fancy opening completely, and just get right on with the story. But there will always be something so magical about that classic “Once upon a time”.

Books about Beginnings

Abby Huxley-Binns

Many books often tackle the theme of beginning. Whether it be great change in the lives of the characters that grants them the option to start again, or having to rebuild their life after tragedy, having to adapt the way you live is something everyone experiences at least once in their lifetime. So, here are five books from a range of genres that I think cover the idea of beginnings, so that you all might be able to find something you relate to.

1. *The Railway Children* by E. Nesbit

The Railway Children was originally published in 1905 and is about three children who must relocate to the countryside after their father is mysteriously taken away. Despite being set over 100 years ago, when I read this book last year, I found it to be heart-warming and highly relatable at times as someone who has also had to move house as a child. It may not be action-packed or even have much plot to it, but it is a story that explores the youth of these siblings as they grow up in a new environment and explore the settings around them. We follow the adventures of Roberta, Peter and Phyllis in the countryside as they find themselves falling in love with their new community and the railway by their house along with the colourful collection of characters that keep it running.

2. *So This is Ever After* by F.T. Lukens

Have you ever wondered what a beginning looks like after the end? *So This is Ever After* follows the story of the rag tag group of friends who, after following the prophecy to overthrow the evil ruler, find themselves suddenly having to run a country, their happily ever after disrupted by the chaos that ensues when trying to rebuild after the previous ruler. A romcom set in the magical Kingdom of Ere follows the love story of Arek and his best friend, a mage, Matt, as they start their new beginning at the end of what is a conventional story. The book itself feels like a warm hug with lovable characters who have found family and ponders the question: is there ever really a beginning of a story if there is never really an end?

3. *Legends and Lattes* by Travis Baldree

Another book set in a fantasy world but with a down to earth and loveable story is *Legends and Lattes*, following the orc Viv in her journey to open up her very own coffee shop, after a life of adventuring. Having to find a way to fit into her new community full of fresh faces and unknown friends, she has to resist the urge to take up her sword again to deal with her problems and find a way to fit in with her new people, as she attempts to open her very own cafe and introduce the city of Thune to the magic of coffee. It helps teach the lesson that we are not always defined by our past and the beginnings are not something out of our control, that we are always the writers of our own life and destiny and can control our own new beginnings. A perfect cosy book to snuggle up with on a rainy day, with a hot chocolate.

4. *Girl in Pieces* by Kathleen Glasgow

Girl in Pieces by Kathleen Glasgow follows Charlotte Davis; after attempting to end her own life after a lifetime of rejection from her friends and family, we see herself battling with the reality of her existence in trying to create a new life for herself. The book is harrowing and moving, not nearly as light and comfortable a read as the previous three recommendations; however, it's an incredibly important story about taking control of your own life and taking advantage of a second chance, as Charlotte's beginning almost starts with her ending. We follow her as she battles trying to stay clean and trying to start fresh, while she fights for the life she deserves.

5. *Foul Lady Fortune* by Chloe Gong

This spin off novel takes place after *These Violent Delights* duology, a Romeo and Juliet retelling set in 1920s Shanghai between rival gangs; however, *Foul Lady Fortune* is a retelling of *As You Like It* set in Shanghai in 1931 after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. It follows Rosalind, a side character from the previous duology, who is rebuilding her life after the tragedies that occurred in 1927 at the end of the previous series, working as a spy to discover Japanese intelligence, as tensions between the countries thicken and the second Sino-Japanese war simmers just at the edge. This book is a fascinating urban fantasy, delving into the supernatural and surreal along with interesting historical elements and brilliant

characters building off pre-existing lore, but it stands to be the beginning of a whole new story.



First Impressions and *The Great Gatsby*

Alex Rollinson

“In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since...”

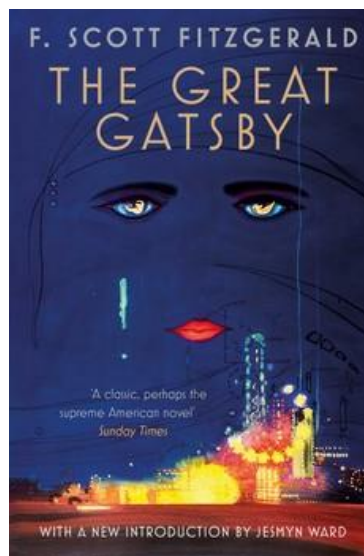
Fitzgerald’s magnum opus, *The Great Gatsby*, would go on to define his career along with the affluent ‘Golden Years’ of the United States. The economic reprise following the First World War, characterised by hedonism and greed, enveloped Americans and fueled their fanatical devotion to the idea of the American Dream. What was once the promise of a great, prosperous period would ultimately end in calamity; Fitzgerald’s novel offers an eerie clairvoyance in its structure and narrative as our narrator, Nick Carraway, becomes jaded with the indulgence of 1920s America. This article, dear *Ink Drinker* subscriber, will discuss Fitzgerald’s characterisation of Mr. Carraway in the opening pages with relation to the impact upon the reader.

Nick begins the novel with a quote from his father – a word of advice which strikes the narrator as particularly poignant. The quote is as follows: “whenever you feel like criticising anyone... just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.” This idea of one’s benefits being perhaps asymmetrical at birth really encapsulates Fitzgerald’s wish to criticise the heralded ‘rugged individualism’ and, more specifically, foreshadows the plight of Gatsby’s character to become ‘old money’. Nick respects his father’s words, saying he is “inclined to reserve all judgements” yet, in the very same sentence, he contrastingly remarks that he has been “the victim of not a few veteran bores.” Rather judgmental for the open-minded man. Fitzgerald exposes the reader for the first time to Nick’s unreliability within the first few sentences, encouraging close reading of his many anecdotes and comments. A literary device underpinning many modernist texts, an unreliable narrator additionally has the potential for entertainment or comedy as demonstrated in Nick’s drunken scenes. Nick’s characterisation, one

of hypocrisy and unreliability, therefore serves a dual purpose: to entertain the reader whilst also urging one to be apprehensive of Nick's accounts of the events that take place.

Nick's character is one of the more likeable ones in the novel and he is my personal favourite. Fitzgerald uses hyperbole to communicate Nick's initial optimism upon moving alone to New York. When he gives a man directions, he proclaims himself to be a "guide, a pathfinder, an original settler", as if he had discovered an uncharted continent! Nick's ecstasy in fulfilling his quest to belong makes the reader happy for him and also sympathetic as the attributes he gave himself seem overzealous considering the simple act of giving directions – this reflects the debilitating effect loneliness must have had on him. Belonging remains a pivotal facet of the American Dream; Nick Carraway typifies an American's insatiable longing for fulfillment and purpose.

Being one of the novel's more complex characters, the beginning of *The Great Gatsby* does an excellent job at subliminally communicating Nick's role as an unreliable narrator. We are left with a positive first impression as his unwavering (if not slightly comical) optimism leaves a lasting impression on the reader. It makes the book's ending even more crushing – when Nick's initial optimistic attitude turns blasé, as he stares impassively at the "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past..."



The Three Photographs & the Strict Criteria to Being Human

Sophia Lemonidis

“I think that even a death mask would hold more of an expression, leave more of a memory. That effigy suggests nothing so much as a human body to which a horse’s head has been attached. Something ineffable makes the beholder shudder in distaste. I have never seen such an inscrutable face on a man.”

On the discussion of beginnings in literature, I present the final lines of the prologue of *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai: a semi-autobiographical novel published in 1948, detailing the devastation of poor familial relationships; alienation from the world around oneself; depression; suicidal urges; addiction, and what it truly means to be categorised as *human*. Because this small paragraph is the one which introduces the very tone of the novel - the bleak, sombre and deprecating themes of dehumanisation which shape the very life of our protagonist, Yozo Oba and - by extension - Dazai himself.

The prologue is five pages long, and this along with the epilogue are the only times in which we see Yozo referenced in the third person. An unnamed character describes three photographs of ‘the man’ (who we later find out to be Yozo, who narrates the main body of the story). The first photograph described is one of Yozo as a boy: he is surrounded by the young women of his family, and the narrator decides that, whilst the majority of those who look upon the photograph would view young Yozo as adorable, they are in fact shallow, and misunderstand the true meaning of beauty. The narrator deems Yozo ugly and disturbing, likening his smile to “*a grinning monkey face,*” instead of anything human or natural. In the second photograph, Yozo is a student; and whilst the narrator acknowledges that Yozo is attractive, he is still disapproving of the face Yozo pulls, describing it as: “*not the smile of a human being.*” It is in the third and final photograph in which the narrator’s viewpoint on Yozo is solidified. He’s older in the third photograph, and he is not pulling any kind of face at all. He looks empty and emotionless - withering away, and completely devoid of life. The narrator imagines that Yozo had been “*caught in the act of dying,*” the moment that somebody turned the camera on him.

The unnamed speaker, here, is under the impression that Yozo does not fit the proper criteria to be deemed human, and Yozo - throughout the main body of the novel - will describe

himself in the same way. Yozo views himself as a failure who simply plays the character of being human; he can't feel the emotions he's supposed to be feeling; he can't comprehend the world or the people around him; he's miserable, and confused, and misunderstood, and this takes him down the spiralling path of addiction, abuse and attempts at suicide. But the people in Yozo's life never seem to notice the 'clownery' of Yozo's actions: the fact that every emotion he pretends to feel or every person he pretends to love is ultimately a lie. There wasn't a single person he met in his entire life that truly understood Yozo; and yet the narrator of the prologue (someone who he never crossed paths with) seems to understand him completely. This narrator knows exactly what Yozo is thinking and feeling; he understands right away that Yozo is so alien, so different, and such a failure as a person that he is - as the name of the novel suggests: *No Longer Human*.

It was, to me, the perfect opening to the story. Already heart-wrenching and disturbing enough that it prepared me for what was to come: the dark story of Yozo (along with Dazai himself) and the moral questions raised; the relatability of what probably shouldn't have been relatable, and everything else in between.

What is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the prologue is the basis of the photographs themselves. These three photographs all actually existed, and were taken of Osamu Dazai throughout the varying stages of his life. I have seen the photographs, and personally I don't think he looks ugly or disturbing at all, but perhaps I misunderstand him, too - just like everybody else in his life did. Still, his work was one which changed my outlook on the world around me and the way I view myself; albeit it did make me rather miserable, too. The prologue was only the beginning of that.



The Truth Is That You Are An Alien From Another Time And Place Altogether

Jenny West

For me, stories are pretty much the most important thing in the world. They're how we learn, how we teach, how we understand each other, how we pass meaning and love from one generation to the next. They're how we connect. We tell stories every day, over and over, changing them, adding to them, bettering them.

So, with countless stories being told every second of the day – on paper, on screen, on stage, through word-of-mouth, on social media – how can a writer really make sure that they 'hook' a reader right at the beginning of a story? How can they ensure that this story is the one that gets read and remembered?

The beginning is everything.

Eleven years ago I was in a bit of a reading slump, having recently had a baby and enduring sleepless night after sleepless night. Having struggled to get through even the first few pages of a book by my favourite author, I instead picked up something new: *The Crimson Petal and the White* by Michel Faber. At 864 pages long, it was, perhaps, an odd choice for someone finding it hard to read. The beginning, though, did absolutely what it needed to do.

“Watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them. This city I am bringing you to is vast and intricate, and you have not been here before. You may imagine, from other stories you've read, that you know it well, but those stories flattered you, welcoming you as a friend, treating you as if you belonged. The truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether.”

What a start. Obviously that second-person direct address is unusual (although not unheard of), but this opening paragraph is doing so much more. The “vast and intricate” “city” is Victorian London, a not uncommon setting for great literature. Anyone who has read Dickens, for example, probably feels that they would recognise this place. But, Faber reminds us, “you have not been here before”. He's right. Despite the “other stories [we've] read”, we do not “know it well”. And that's because there are parts of Victorian London – the most seedy, disturbing parts – that Faber is about to take us to that even the likes of Dickens would

never have been able to visit, because Faber is writing in the 21st century, when life and the expectations of readers have, of course, changed dramatically.

There's also a little bit of advertising here – we're being sold a story unlike anything we've read before. And that sense of persuasion only increases. A couple of paragraphs later, we are told: "And yet you did not choose me blindly. Certain expectations were aroused. Let's not be coy: you were hoping I would satisfy all the desires you're too shy to name, or at least show you a good time." The sexual connotations are obvious, and an indicator that we are about to explore one of the most notorious aspects of the Victorian era: prostitution. (Many experts believe that there were 80,000 prostitutes in Victorian London, although this figure is disputed.)

Of course, Dickens himself did provide us with one of the most lovable, sympathetic prostitutes in literary history: Nancy in *Oliver Twist*. Was he, however, ever really able to show us the vivid, horrifying detail of her true reality (before her violent end)?

Faber can. A little further into the chapter, he introduces us to Caroline: "She's a sweet soul; you'll like her. And if you don't, it hardly matters: as soon as she's set you on the right path, you can abandon her without fuss. In the five years since she's been making her own way in the world, she has never got within shouting distance of the sorts of ladies and gentlemen among whom you'll be moving later; she works, lives and will certainly die in Church Lane, tethered securely to this rookery."

This is so clever. Faber makes the reader one of Caroline's 'clients': "you can abandon her without fuss", but provokes the necessary guilt too by reminding us of the "certain[t]y" of Caroline's future death as a pauper. And the next paragraph, which I cannot quote from in a college journal because it's too graphic, goes a long way to showing the reader just how grim a Victorian prostitute's day-to-day would have been.

I stayed with Caroline, and then was introduced to the real protagonist, Sugar, whose story really did keep me in its grip for all of those pages!

It's an absolutely gorgeous cake of a book – a real treat, and completely unique. And it all begins . . . well, with that beginning. I recommend *The Crimson Petal and the White* to anyone with a love of reading, an interest in the Victorian era and, I have to say, a strong stomach!

Is the beginning the real beginning?

Kaci Toker-Robinson

Within nature, every beginning has an ending, and all endings herald a new beginning. Every day tides go out and then come in. As each day ends a night begins, followed by a new day, followed once again by night. When winter ends, spring begins. And so, it goes. Every ending is followed by a beginning: life out of death.

And our lives have seasons and cycles as well. Each one of us experiences an endless flow of beginnings and endings. Every season of our life has a beginning and an ending that leads to a new beginning. Childhood ends and adolescence begins, adolescence ends, and adulthood begins; young adulthood ends, and middle age begins; middle age ends, and old age begins.

We generally like beginnings — we celebrate the new. But we resist endings and attempt to delay them. Very often we don't feel the joy of a beginning, knowing that in each beginning are the seeds of the end. Although endings can be painful, they are less so if, instead of resisting them, we look at time as a natural process of nature: as leaves budding in the spring, coming to full leaf in the summer, turning to red and gold in autumn and dropping from the trees in winter. It is a comfort to comprehend that we are an integral part of the great scheme of nature.

Every single book holds a beginning just as much as they hold an end; however, the question is: at what point does the beginning start? Some stories focus on presenting the reader with a series of flashbacks to show the characters beginning at life; however, is the true beginning the prologue of their book? Or is it when they were born? Honestly, to me, the answer is neither. The beginning of someone's life appears at different stages and the beginning in a good story could start in the middle.

What I mean is, books that start in the middle of the whole story and you must keep reading to figure out what happened previously for the main character to get to that point. Kind of like a mystery. Extra points if the character has amnesia or doesn't know about his or her past. It can be any genre. I just love those books where you get little bits of information along the way, and you start to piece together what happened before the current events so you can figure out what's going to happen next.

Some examples may include:

An Unkindness of Magicians by Kat Howard – This book is what we would have got if George RR Martin had attempted to write the HP wizarding world. You're dumped in the middle of the action; the beginning of the novel is chock full of details that you can tell are relevant, but you have no idea of why/how. It's both political and magical. I don't think this book is for everyone, but it may hit the spot for what you're looking for.

Steven Erikson's ten-book fantasy series *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* - There's an incredible amount of back story that gets dribbled out over ten, thousand-page volumes, so a first-time reader is constantly working out mysteries and riddles, and Erikson takes almost vicious pleasure in hiding the ball. That's a feature, not a flaw, if you like that kind of thing, which I do. And there's a bonus: reading it the second time is like getting your first pair of glasses to correct bad vision. Suddenly everything makes sense!

This technique of storytelling is referred to as a narrative beginning *in media res*. Two of the most famous examples are *The Odyssey* by Homer and *The Aeneid* by Virgil, both being excellent reads.



Why the ending is the beginning

Lizzie Rice

When we think of the beginning, we think of the start of something. Whether this is a film or a novel or life itself, the beginning has always been the start. However, I believe the beginning is also the end - the happily ever after.

Now hear me out: when a film ends, the story doesn't. Normally, the end is the start and if the end is the start, then surely the end is also the beginning. Life does not stop for these characters when they defeat the evil government in a dystopian world or at the wedding at the end of a romance novel. This is the beginning of something new.

The end in a way is stories untold or the pathway to the beginning of what's next. Even after sequels and series are published there will always be more to tell; whether this is entertaining or not is the reason as to why we only hear some of these.

In the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, there is a scene where in one of the universes a character says, "in another life, I would have really liked just doing laundry and taxes with you." This is the beginning because it is just mundane which means we take these things for granted. To most doing laundry and taxes is dull; however, to some it is doing something dull with someone you love which brings life and colour to the place. This reason is why it can be seen as romantic. It doesn't matter how dull the end might seem, it is a happy beginning if you are doing it surrounded by those you love and care for. Love most definitely is not the end of anything, it is the beginning of companionship and hope.

The studio Ghibli film *Howl's Moving Castle* has an end that is also the beginning. At the end of the film, even though Howl and Sophie are together, we learn a lot about earlier insignificances that are more important than we thought. Sophie tells a young Howl "Find me in the future" which you soon realize matches up with the start of the film where Howl says "There you are, sweetheart, sorry I'm late. I was looking everywhere for you." This ending in a way reveals the beginning. Howl created his moving castle to find Sophie and has always been looking for her but there would be no moving castle without Sophie. Sophie may not know it at the beginning

but, if not for the end, this story would not have begun. This is a cyclical story that is a perfect way to show how the ending and beginning can be the same thing.

In conclusion, I wanted to say when you finish a novel and are gut-wrenchingly heartbroken that it's over, don't be. This is not the end but the beginning. The characters have another chance to start over but this time they have the chance to write their own story.



Just to Feel the Sun Again

Mimi Pattison-Drury

For years I've shuddered on my own,
Searching myself to the bone.
The sun blinds as a soundless stone,
The moon distant as death itself.
I loved it once, but now I see
This world cannot inhabit me.

An elegy from tiny heads.
A rush of rain to quench the dread
Which I recall. Though now, instead,
I glimpse the clouds. I touch the stars.
I've waited for this half my life
And everything is filtered bright.

The fall rises like ocean's brine;
All sharpness glitters in sunshine.
A hand reaches to snatch at mine—
There's nothing there. Nothing to hold
Now that my dreams have been undone.
My head tips back. Life has begun.

Eggshells splinter, skies burn black;
My fingertips extend to crack
It open like a caged glass plaque
While the world turns without a thought.
I slither-squirm. I synthesise,
Unpeeled to fresh bones and wet eyes.

New truth glows through the fading pain.
Those who hurt can try again.
Those once hurt can try the same.
Old candles burn on blood and tears.
The music starts. I hear it sing.
My spine bursts free as chalk-white wings.

Newfound Freedom

Brad O'Connell

Newfound freedom is a fancy term for being empty.

It's as silly as enjoying the hunger more than the food.

Too many people wear freedom as a medal.

They must be colourblind because orange jumpsuits don't go around your neck, Arms do.

But freedom would say they are the same as shackles.

Freedom is painting glasses with lipstick that was meant for another,

Or venturing a field of corn having nobody to experience the magic with,

Or being the only one to know our weaknesses.

Freedom is something we wave as a white flag when love has been too good or too rough with us,

Even though love said it would bring out the best in us,

And protect us from taunting eyes and lips of drunken ecstasy.

Newfound freedom should be the word for being intertwined with another.

Whatever ignites the embers of your heart and creates a campfire,

That is freedom.

Flowers

Tabitha Diack

If flowers had wings

I don't fancy they'd want to leave,

The cool mud and gentle wind is quite nice

Amongst the weeds.

With rosemary faces and grand green leaves

And stubborn stems prove hidden gems,

Tall against the breeze.



A Guide to Your Own Beginning

Ruby Quillin

If you are an avid reader, it's more than likely that at one point you have considered writing, figured there is far too much to do, and swiftly given up. We've all done it but today, we will break the curse and get that best-selling novel begun with my five simple steps! My top tip for this guide is, if it doesn't work for you, jumble the steps; everyone's brain works differently and mismatching the steps may make it easier for you to get a fresh start with fresh ideas!

5 steps to beginning a novel

1. World building. You're going to need some sort of setting to start any story, but wherever you choose to place your world is completely up to you. From a small Spanish town to the deep abyss of space, the world (and anywhere else) is your oyster so go as far or near to home as you want! You could even write about yourself, setting your story in your own home if you're not sure where else you can go. I find starting with the smaller steps makes the job much easier.
2. Next, I would move onto the characters, or more specifically your main character. They say write what you know, and I find basing your character around a friend, family member, yourself or your cat will often make them more dimensional and realistic. Consider both physical appearance and personality in this step; perhaps if you feel arty enough you could make a sketch and now you have your setting you can add clothes or adjust your character to fit your setting – or stand out from it!
3. By now you should find the most daunting task slightly less intimidating. You will most likely find that as you complete step one and two, step three – the story itself – will have been forming in your head. The story is undeniably the biggest step in starting a story but choosing one special thing from your character or setting could allow an endless number of stories. Perhaps your setting has a secret tunnel? Or your character wears a special piece of jewellery?
4. The possibilities that step 3 provides are endless, but if you want to ever actually begin writing your story (and I must stress you don't have to if you find the brainstorming more fun) it must end somewhere. I would recommend repeating step 3

a few more times, aim for 5 special stand-out points to build a story around and brainstorm for 5 or 10 minutes for each of them. Then, you can begin to narrow down your options, eliminating ones you find go nowhere and you're successfully on your way to writing your very own story. How exciting!!

5. Now you have your characters, setting and story sorted, one useful step would be to plot a timeline, just to ensure your story is nailed down! Consider your conflicts and your resolutions. How will the events of your story be organised or written, past or present tense? Will it be in the form of diary entry, letters, 1st or 3rd person? This is the step to sort out all those finicky details.
6. Last but most certainly not least is the actual writing. And beginnings are often the hardest part, but also will set the scene for your whole story so are the most impactful. There is no pressure to write a beginning that uses all the complex imagery techniques you may have been taught. A simple beginning will be just as good, perhaps better. Remember to have fun with your writing! A beginning is a beautiful thing when you get the hang of it, so good luck!!!

(Bonus tip – If you followed my ‘how to make a map’ article from the last *Ink Drinker* edition you could use that to skip a few steps and you should have a fantastic fantasy novel on the way very soon, with an accompanying map.)



Spot the Difference



The Ink Drinker Editorial Team

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Submissions

For our next issue, which will be published in the first week of the next academic year, we invite submissions from any Wyke student or member of staff on the theme of autumn.

Interpret this as you will! We are looking for:

- articles and/or book reviews - approximately 500 words
- creative writing – approximately 500 words of poetry, prose or script on the theme of autumn
- illustrations on the theme of autumn – black and white or colour.

Please email all submissions to literaryjournal@wyke.ac.uk by Tuesday 29 August 2023.

