

The Mindful Writer: Noble Truths of the Writing Life

Dinty W. Moore

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A quote from Thomas Mann on the back of this petite red hardcover gives a good taste of what's inside: "A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people." Dinty W. Moore, professor and director of creative writing at Ohio University, has written about his messy attempts to combine Buddhism and an overstuffed life in the past. In *The Mindful Writer*, he has collected and briefly comments on quotes that exemplify what he calls the "noble truths" of the writing life, Moore's take on Buddhism's four noble truths. These are divided into sections focused on the writer's mind (creativity), desk (the work itself), vision (how to "mindfully engage" with writing), and life (one's identity as a writer).

It must have been a pleasure to curate this little group of quotes and muse on them; Moore's writing seems to have a wry grin tucked inside. Yet in very few words he taps into deep truths about the writing process. The Mann quote is the book's first, and initially seems like either a koan or slightly bitter joke, but Moore spins a positive outlook inside. Writing is more difficult for writers, he says, "Because we care about finding the precise word, the clearest expression, and we understand that sometimes a thought needs to be revised tens or hundreds of times before we find the perfect way to say what we really mean." So it would follow that if the effort is daunting, you must be doing something right.

These musings yield some sound advice that new *and* seasoned writers will appreciate. Read work aloud, commit to sit down at the same time each day to write, get down whatever you can and be willing to rework it completely. Or don't! Moore notes in the introduction that he sometimes found two quotes giving opposing advice, but that each was so persuasive he included both. This frees the reader to carve an individualized path (or run in circles endlessly, which many surely do). *The Mindful Writer* is small but powerful; it will be a welcome addition to many writers' desks, and an inspiring and supportive gift for those who have just set foot on the path.

HEATHER SEGCEL (April 20, 2012)

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