OVERCOMING WRITER’S BLOCK
AND RELEASING CREATIVITY

Between Courage and Fear

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Abstract

In this project, I study writer’s block and how to release creativity. The focus is on fear as a cause of writer’s block and courage as the remedy. I use psychological theory to define the concepts of fear and courage, and I analyze a practical writing book.

The approach in this study is based on the creative writing tradition as well as the academic. This means that I use creative writing in the project, and I challenge my own courage by stepping outside the regular routine of writing an academic rapport.

The study finds that fear is natural in a writing process and that it takes some type of courage to present one’s voice. It also finds that texts that writers fear to write include something of importance, and that is part of why a writer fears to express it. I suggest that, to overcome fear and enable courage, a personal writing coach can be beneficial.
CONTENTS

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 3

2. Problem field ......................................................................................................... 5
   2.1 When the cause of writer's block is fear ......................................................... 5
   2.2 Courage is the remedy ..................................................................................... 5
   2.3 Texts that we fear to write are highly important ............................................ 5
   2.4 Summary ........................................................................................................... 6

3. Problem definition ................................................................................................ 7

4. Delimitation ........................................................................................................... 8

5. Method .................................................................................................................. 9

6. Let's begin ............................................................................................................ 11

7. Theory: Definition of concepts ........................................................................... 12
   7.1 Writer's block ................................................................................................... 12
   7.2 Releasing creativity ......................................................................................... 12
   7.3 Courage and fear ............................................................................................. 13

8. Empiri: Fear and Courage in *Writing Down the Bones* ..................................... 17
   8.1 What we fear .................................................................................................... 17
   8.2 What happens to writing when we fear ......................................................... 18
   8.3 Fear is good ..................................................................................................... 19
   8.4 Writing despite fear ......................................................................................... 20

9. Discussion ............................................................................................................. 23

10. Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 27

11. The End .............................................................................................................. 28

12. Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 29
1. Introduction

You sit in front of your computer or your notebook. You have dedicated your time to write. You know your topic (or maybe you don’t - but you know why you are here - you are here to write). Your fingers grab the pen or hit the keyboard and it seems a dance with word is being freely transformed from your inner to the outer - onto paper or screen.

It’s easy. There is no resistance, there is purely surrender to thought and words, and after just a few minutes, the words have formed sentences, and sentences have formed text. After more minutes, or maybe hours, a draft has been made, or a text is finished. You feel emptied in a good way. Satisfied.

However, the writing process is not always as simple and straightforward as this. It can be difficult to write, and it can feel impossible. The concept of writer’s block is not only known to influence students - even professional writers through history have been affected by this state. Mike Rose, American education scholar and writer of *Writer’s Block: The Cognitive Dimension* begins his book with a quote from Flaubert, who wrote: “You don’t know what it is to stay a whole day with your head in your hands trying to squeeze your unfortunate brain so as to find a word.”¹

Why is this? Why do people find themselves trapped, unable to form a single sentence? I am deeply curious about this subject, and about where people are stuck in different processes and why. More importantly, I am curious about how they unlock the block and move forward. In this context, I have come to have many conversations with how to get a message “out there”, or getting a point across - through text. In countless conversations with writers (in all categories of writing: fiction and non-fiction authors, students, people with small businesses who want to post on Facebook, entrepreneurs who struggle with text on webpages etc.) with writer’s block, one thing have kept appearing: an inner voice in their mind that said: “What if this isn’t good? What if people don’t like what I write? What if they say something hurtful about what I’ve written - or maybe even worse - what if no one reacts towards it?” I have chosen to interpret this inner voice as a voice of fear. Fear of judgement from the world.

My aim is to help raise awareness of this fear-factor in writing, and the objective of this is to release creativity. The target group has two traits:

1. They can write (have some skill in the craftsmanship within writing) and want to deliver a message. They do not have to be writers of books, so when I say “writer” I mean it literally: someone who writes. Anything.
2. They experience a feeling of fear towards sharing their words with the world. They have an inner voice that tell them to stop. This can be either on a conscious or on a subconscious level.

¹ Rose, *Writer’s Block: The Cognitive Dimension*, p. 1
In other words, this study want to help writers who block because of fear in order to release their creativity. This is for the sake of books, blogs, letters, status updates on the social media, articles etc. to be written.
2. Problem field

2.1 When the cause of writer’s block is fear

Danish author, singer and songwriter Majbritte Ulrikkeholm writes in the prologue of her book The Magical Space (Danish title: Det Magiske Rum):

“‘And when you write,” he then said.

“When I write? Yes, when I write I never in my wildest dreams imagine that anyone will ever read what I have written.”

“Can you believe in that?” he asked.

“I could not imagine anything else.”

“Then maybe that's why some people never get to write the first line,” he said, “because they think about all the people who are going to read the things they haven’t even written yet.”

“Yes, that might very well be.”

When you write and thereby express yourself in one way or another, you expose yourself, which makes you vulnerable. In this, the fear of being judged (by “the world” - colleagues, students, fans, friends, family etc.) and the fear of failing can appear.

In relation to this, I assume that a writer may contain an inner judge that - in order to protect her from the judgement of “the world” - stops her from writing. Thus creating the writer’s block. The inner judge consists of what I call perfectionism, (self) criticism and censorship.

2.2 Courage is the remedy

If this is the case, if fear is a prevention for writing, then courage must be essential to overcome the block. It is the act of moving forward despite fear that is courageous. The question is, how does a writer find the courage, and how does she live by it (in her work)?

2.3 Texts that we fear to write are highly important

The written word is an old way of sharing knowledge. This passes the knowledge from generation to generation and makes sure that the human species does not have to reinvent everything at the death of

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2 Ulrikkeholm, Det Magiske Rum, p. 11 (the quote is freely translated from the Danish book).
wise and experienced men and women. It helps us travel to far corners of the world without ever leaving our homes and opens our minds towards other ways of living. Both fiction and non-fiction tell us about ourselves, our fellow human beings, our history, our world.

What is further important is writing texts that we fear to share. Maybe this is where some of the most significant writings will be found: in the dark corners of writers’ minds, where they fear judgement (or being fired or even killed), and feel ashamed or alone. This is a place where we can find taboos and secrets. This is where we might find other truth than what we find on social media’s perfect surface. This is where we can find something of importance, something that we all might need to know. Something we have in common – even though we feel alone with this particular subject or that specific feeling.

2.4 Summary

In short, my assumptions and objects of investigation in this study are:

1. Fear can cause writer’s block
2. Writers have an inner judge that stops them, so they avoid exposure of their vulnerability
3. Courage is the remedy
4. Texts that we fear to write are highly important
3. Problem definition

What is the view on courage and fear in context to writer’s block in *Writing Down the Bones*, and how does it comply with psychological theory of fear and courage in the creating act? What do they suggest in order to overcome fear and release creativity?
4. Delimitation

There are many theories about the causes of writer’s block, and some of them say that it does not even exist. Fear is merely one theory about why this phenomenon appears. However, since this is a project that focus on the writers who experience fear of sharing their words, I have decided to exclude other theories about the cause of writer’s block in general.

In the choice of analysis method, I considered to search for a classical English analysis. I decided for a different approach that is based on the creative writing idea. This will be elaborated on in chapter 5.

For my empiri, I contemplated using a novel as basis for my analysis. However, I found it more interesting to analyze a book that articulates the practical aspects of writer’s block (though the author of the book does not name it writer’s block). This is to be able to use the findings in this project in my daily work, where I support writers in writing processes.

This project includes a definition of creativity. However, it is quite limited, as I do not focus on the source of creativity. While some people point to creativity as a divine intervention, others point to the subconscious mind or basic craftsmanship as pathways for creative acts, and this is a discussion that could inhabit a whole project for itself. Therefore, I have narrowed my description of creativity down to how creativity looks like, when it is performed.
5. Method

In the first part of the project, I study the following concepts: writer’s block, creativity, courage and fear. I use *Writer’s Block: The Cognitive Dimension* by Mike Rose, American education scholar, to define writer’s block, and *The Courage to Create* by American psychologist Rollo May to identify creativity, courage and fear. The focus is on the latter two, as they are the main research area in this project.

The literature I use draw on psychology in order to outline the mental aspects of the concepts. This project seeks to open the gates of courage, so that fear can be flushed away (or, at least tamed a bit) and creativity can be released. To be able to see to this, the psychological approach provides knowledge that can help understand the mind and how to engage with it in order to release creativity.

I have chosen theory about creativity on a larger scale than just writing in order to capture these concepts in a general context. In the section with definitions of the concepts courage and fear, I discuss the relationship with the subject of the project and suggest how the theory can be linked towards writing. I do this to show the relevance of each definition, thus making them well established in this project.

In the second part of the project, I carry out an analysis of the bestselling book *Writing Down the Bones* by author, writing teacher and painter Natalie Goldberg. This is a practical book with a hint of self help. I have chosen it for my empiri to link the general theory to writing directly. I chose this book due to its popularity (at least one million copies sold) and because the self help shelf reaches out to many different kinds of people. It is not only the academic or the trained writer, who reads and uses books like *Writing Down the Bones*: it is anyone who is interested in writing, in inspiration and creativity and/or experience difficulty in the area.

The analysis is based on a common sense approach. In this approach, I divide the analysis into categories and show Goldberg’s view on fear and courage in writing by showing what she says about the concepts directly. The common sense approach is chosen in order to establish the creative writing tone in the project.

In the discussion, I link the theory and the analysis to my assumptions. I investigate where the theory and Goldberg’s descriptions agree and disagree with each other and my assumptions. In this, I provide my own reflections on where May’s theory and Goldberg’s book can be expanded.

The tone in this study alternates between academic writing and the creative writing tradition. Goldberg asks of her writing students that they dare to show themselves, their naked selves, and leave the structured and, more importantly, safe ways of writing. She also claims that it is important to trust one’s own voice. I decided to follow that path: to show myself and trust my own voice. In this project, I am

\[3\] Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*, p. 13 and 77
actively taking a step outside the regular routine of academic writing while honoring a basic structure and reference system.
6. Let’s begin

This is my initial thoughts. Let us see, what May and Goldberg say about the themes and my reflections.

Let’s begin.
7. Theory: Definition of concepts

In the following, I will present the four concepts of this project: writer’s block, creativity, courage and fear.

7.1 Writer’s block

When a writer suffer from writer’s block, it means that they are not moving forward. Mike Rose, American education scholar, writes in his book *Writer’s Block: The Cognitive Dimension* that when a writer study her subject and generate ideas, she is still in the process, and though she is not actually writing, this is not a block. He states that two things are present in the definition of writer’s block:

1. “basic writing skills that, for some reason, cannot be exercised.”
2. Commitment to the writing task - what he calls “a degree of alertness and of effort.”

Rose’ definition of writer’s block is thus “an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment.” He also points to a presence of certain feelings in the blocked writer: “anxiety, frustration, anger, or confusion.

7.2 Releasing creativity

May says that creativity’s authentic form is “the process of bringing something new into being.” In context with writing, this points to shaping text from the first word on a blank page to editing, changing structure and formulations, testing varieties of endings, getting feedback and rewriting passages over and maybe over again.

However, there is also a feeling involved in the creative act. According to May, creativity is an intense feeling of joy, “the emotion that goes with heightened consciousness, the mood that accompanies the experience of actualizing one’s own potentialities.” This points to a type of writing that brings forth a certain feeling of inspiration. He adds the quality of “the encounter” as necessary for the creative process.

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4 Rose, *WB*, p. 3
5 Ibid
6 Ibid
7 Ibid
8 May, *Courage*, p. 39
9 May, *Courage*, p. 45
This is degree of absorption and intensity a writer experience, when she engages in creative acts - when she writes\textsuperscript{10}.

In this project, the importance of creativity lies on the fact of writing with a feeling of excitement, intensity and absorption.

### 7.3 Courage and fear

In the title of his book, \textit{The Courage to Create} May points to the necessity of courage in any creating act. He argues that death is the ultimate motivation for both creating and the fear, which prevents creating. He writes about the fear of the atom bomb that:

"Shall we, as we feel our foundations shaking, withdraw in anxiety and panic? (...) shall we become paralyzed and cover our inaction with apathy? If we do those things, we will have surrendered our chance to participate in the forming of the future. (...) Or shall we seize the courage necessary to preserve our sensitivity, awareness, and responsibility in the face of radical change? Shall we consciously participate, on however small the scale, in the forming of a new society?"\textsuperscript{11}

This describes May's general assumption that the creative act forms the society and the future, and that the fear of death is present in this. He mentions Socrates, Jesus and Joan of Arc as three examples of people who have participated in a massive shaping of the world through their actions. Today they are seen as what May calls saints, but in their time they fought significant resistance and were all killed for their actions, beliefs and words\textsuperscript{12}. This points to the ultimate fear of expressing our voice to the world: that we will die because of it.

To accommodate this natural sensation of fear in the creating act, May presents courage as the solution. In the preface of his book, he stresses that courage is no less than \textit{essential} when one is creating. The origin of the word is the French word “coeur”, which means “heart”\textsuperscript{13}. He explains how the heart pumps blood to all parts of the body, making this the most important organ in the body. This analogy is used to describe how he sees courage as the “foundation that underlies and gives reality to all other virtues and personal values.”\textsuperscript{14} He exemplifies by saying that “Without courage our love pales into mere dependency. Without courage our fidelity becomes conformism.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{10} May, \textit{Courage}, p. 41
\textsuperscript{11} May, \textit{Courage}, p. 11-12
\textsuperscript{12} May, \textit{Courage}, p. 35
\textsuperscript{13} May, \textit{Courage}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid
It is a mistake to see courage as rashness. This is the kind of “bravado used to compensate for one’s unconscious fear and to prove one’s machismo”\textsuperscript{16}, May says. Real courage is something else. He includes the following five categories in his understanding and meaning of courage:

1. Physical courage
2. Moral courage
3. Social courage
4. Conviction and doubt - a paradox
5. Creative courage

They are described in the following, ending with the most important type of courage.

**Physical courage**

May argues that the quality of physical courage has changed. Before it was the “pioneer heroes” who “could draw a gun faster than their opponent”, that were considered courageous. Today May suggest a new kind of physical courage: a more sensitive kind where the person has the courage to listen to and with the body. He suggests yoga, meditation and the like as cultivators of this kind of courage that should “be valuing the body as means of empathy with others”\textsuperscript{17}.

In relation to the writer, the physical courage appeals to the writer as a person who can feel his body and notice the signs it sends her. Through this, she can possibly clear her mind and focus on her writing, or get a clearer connection to what it is, she is aiming for in her text.

**Moral courage**

Moral courage comes from an empathy and an identification with the sufferings of others. It is described as taking part in the actions of people who stand up to the ones who is responsible to other people’s sufferings. This form of courage is exerted through non-violent actions\textsuperscript{18}.

The moral courage especially applies to writers who, in their texts, criticize society structures, politics, dictators and the like. May tells about Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, a Russian author who “stood up alone against the Soviet bureaucracy in protest against the inhumane and cruel treatment of men and women in

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid
\textsuperscript{17} May, *Courage*, p. 14-15
\textsuperscript{18} May, *Courage*, p. 15-17 and 21
Russian prison camps.” Solzhenitsyn was taken to prison and harassed - today he lives in exile in Switzerland, where he continues to write critically about other nations.

**Social courage**

May describes social courage as “the capacity to risk one’s self in the hope of achieving meaningful intimacy.” He addresses a typical strategy that people apply to avoid the risk of becoming destroyed in the relationship to another: they shift focus to the body. In his elaboration of this, he says that it is vulnerable to be genuinely open and share thoughts and emotions, and it is apparently easier to be physically naked with another than emotionally naked, according to May. To do this anyway requires courage.

May draws on theory by psychoanalyst Otto Rank who claims that people are confronted by two fears in this situation: life and death fear. He describes life fear as the fear of being abandoned, and the need for dependency on someone else. “It shows itself in the need to throw one’s self so completely into a relationship that one has no self left with which to relate.” He describes death fear as the fear of being absorbed by another and having one’s independence taken away.

May suggests two words that can accommodate these fears: solidarity and solitude. They come from the story *The Artist at Work* by Albert Camus. In the story, one word is revealed on a painting, but it is unclear what the word is. It can be either: “solitary - being alone; keeping one's distance from events, maintaining the peace of mind necessary for listening to one's deeper self. Or it can be *solidary* - “living in the market place”; solidarity, involvement, or identifying with the masses, as Karl Marx put it.”

To put this into context with the writer, the fear of being emotionally naked can be compared with the fear of exposure. The life fear could be writers who experience a need for others’ recognition in their work. They fear failure and that people will abandon them. They become overly focused on what the world wants from them, more than they focus on what it is they want to say (to the world). The death fear could be a writer who fears losing herself in her writing or who fears success and people who has demands of her.

In the sense of solidarity and solitude, you could say that the writer must be both introvert and extrovert. In the extrovert phases, a writer must for instance seek out to ask questions and collect material for a book. Later she must be in contact with a publishing agency, and market herself. At a book reception, she must mingle and she might give lectures on the book’s subject later etc. These all need her to go out, be extrovert in one way or another and be solidary with the society. The introvert phases are naturally when she sits down to do her writing. Here she is silent; she listens, condenses the input and writes.

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19 May, *Courage*, p. 16
20 May, *Courage*, p. 17-18
21 May, *Courage*, p. 18
22 May, *Courage*, p. 19
23 May, *Courage*, p. 19-20
Conviction and doubt - a paradox

May appoints the presence of both conviction and doubt as “characteristic of the highest types of courage.” He explains how doubting your creation is not only common, but that it also exemplifies a healthy approach to one’s doing. He claims, “the person with the courage to believe and at the same time to admit to his doubts is flexible and open to new learning.” and adds that doubt “presupposes a greater respect for truth, an awareness that truth always goes beyond anything that can be said or done at any given moment.”

In this, doubt and fear are almost equivalent to each other. Doubt can be translated to the fear of being wrong which might lead to the fear of being rejected by the public and ultimately, becoming a failure. Doubt can help a writer to investigate and do her best, so that her idea, her creation, her text will come to light and be as good as it can be. Doubt can drive her forward. However, it can also slow her down - or worst case kill her ideas and projects. If she lets the fear, doubt, win, she will stop creating. It is up to the writer herself to decide whether fear and doubt should prevent or encourage growth.

Creative courage

Lastly, May describes creative courage as the most important kind of courage. Here lies the discovery of “new forms, new symbols, new patterns on which a new society can be built.” He explains how the society is changing, and how artists use symbols to express the collective conscious. This leads to an actual participation in what he says “form the structure of the new world.”

A writer discovers new symbols, forms and patterns through text. One thing is that letters in itself are actual symbols, as we know from semantics. Each A, B and C symbolizes something and together they form words, which form patterns that tell the reader yet another something. In addition, text can be symbolic and paint pictures and symbols for the reader.

24 May, Courage, p. 20
25 May, Courage, p. 21
26 May, Courage, p. 21
27 Ibid
28 May, Courage, p. 22–23
29 May, Courage, p. 36
8. Empiri: Fear and Courage in *Writing Down the Bones*

In her book, *Writing Down the Bones* Natalie Goldberg does not address writer's block as an issue of her interest. Actually, in an interview, Goldberg states that she does not believe in writer’s block at all\(^{30}\). Therefore, unlocking writer’s block is not the aim of her book. Or is it? Throughout the book, Goldberg provides anecdotes from her own writing life and from her life as a writing teacher, and she offers practical advice that the reader can jump right into and use in her writing. She bases her advice on her own experiences combined with the practice of Zen. She says that creativity without meditation does not interest her, and that writing is her deepest Zen practice\(^{31}\).

In this way, Goldberg encourages and cheers on any writer or hopeful writer-in-spe in need of inspiration and guidance that holds this book in her hands.

Here, I will present Goldberg’s view on fear based on a common sense approach, where I, instead of analyzing the entire book, focus on the areas where fear and courage are mentioned. The analysis is summed up in these four phrases:

1. What we fear
2. What happens to writing when we fear
3. Fear is good
4. Writing despite fear

### 8.1 What we fear

Goldberg argues that writers fear to expose themselves. She mentions this when she explains how writing marathons (she and other writers meet and write for hours, and read their texts to each other without commenting) makes herself and the other writers feel naked and out of control. “It is as though some big hole had been blasted in the belly of your self-defenses and suddenly you are standing naked as who you really are.” Goldberg says, “(…) you feel as though you just lost your face. Don’t worry, the state does pass and you become guarded and ornery again.”\(^{32}\)

What is it, writers want to guard? And what guards it? To answer this, I will turn to what Goldberg calls inner voices. She says that they “are merely guardians and demons protecting the real treasure, the first thoughts of the mind.”\(^{33}\) Goldberg encourages writers to get through to these first thoughts, because this is “where you are writing what your mind actually sees and feels, not what it thinks it should see or feel.” She

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\(^{30}\) Ross, *I don’t Believe in Writer’s Block*

\(^{31}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 101 and 102

\(^{32}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 91

\(^{33}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 18
adds, “It’s a great opportunity to capture the oddities of your mind.”\textsuperscript{34} It is these first thoughts, or rather, what they contain, that writers fear will be exposed. Something in them wants to “keep us away from our true heart”\textsuperscript{35}, she claims.

The inner voices have several names in \textit{Writing Down the Bones}: the internal censor, the editor or the critic - also known as monkey mind\textsuperscript{36}. It is the thought that someone might think ill of the writer, that e.g. she might be crazy or boring, that prevents her from writing down her first thoughts\textsuperscript{37}. Ego also plays a role in this, she says, as we have a mechanism that “tries to be in control, tries to prove the world is permanent and solid, enduring and logical.”\textsuperscript{38}

Who we really are, our first thoughts and our true heart are the gems that we hold inside us, according to Goldberg. They are something very precious that we fear to show the world, because when we do, we feel naked, exposed and vulnerable. Therefore, writers have these guardians and demons that protects them from exposing them.

### 8.2 What happens to writing when we fear

When we let fear intervene with our writing, there are two possible consequences:

1. Freezing
2. Boring texts

**Freezing**

The following three examples pinpoints writer’s block as a consequence of fear according to Goldberg:

1. \textit{Writing Down the Bones} ends with an interview where Goldberg is asked what the biggest excuses not to write, that her writing students tell her, are. She lists seven excuses, whereof four is directly linked to fear, for instance: “I’m afraid to let myself out.” and “I’m scared that I’m not good enough.”\textsuperscript{39}

2. In the interview, she tells that even she knows fear, and that it influenced her when she wrote \textit{Bones}. She says that she had “tremendous fear both of failure and of success.”\textsuperscript{40} and that she spent six months working as a baker, because she quit writing for that period.

\textsuperscript{34} Goldberg, \textit{Bones}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{35} Goldberg, \textit{Bones}, p. 101
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid
\textsuperscript{37} Goldberg, \textit{Bones}, p. 13 and 23
\textsuperscript{38} Goldberg, \textit{Bones}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{39} Goldberg, \textit{Bones}, p. 100
\textsuperscript{40} Goldberg, \textit{Bones}, p. 105
3. Goldberg says that expecting something great is a perfect way to freeze in your writing. She says that she has writing students that said they decided they were going to write the great American novel and have not written a line since \(^{41}\).

**Boring texts**

A second consequence to writing with fear as a companion is that the writer hides herself (and “the oddities of her mind”) by following logic, rigid structure and writing what is safe instead of writing what has edge. It makes the writing “bent, untruthful to what is real.” \(^{42}\) Or straight up “Proper and boring.” \(^{43}\) Goldberg says.

She gives the example of a specific piece of text: “I cut the daisy from my throat” that was transformed, after a revision from the inner voices, to: “My throat was a little sore, so I didn’t say anything.” \(^{44}\) This points to something extraordinary that was turned into a logic and mundane sentence.

### 8.3 Fear is good

There is a third way of reacting towards fear, Goldberg says. A writer can react differently towards fear than blocking or writing boring texts. Fear can actually be the ingredient that sparks the imagination and show “the place where energy is unobstructed by social politeness or the internal censor,” \(^{45}\) Goldberg insists that a writer that exposes herself will create text worth reading. She says that “Being naked in a piece is a loss of control. This is good. We’re not in control anyway.” \(^{46}\) She says if we write from that place of fear and chaos, if we let go of control, it will “eventually break us and open us to the world as it is. Out of this tornado of fear will come a genuine writing voice.” \(^{47}\)

This places fear among the best go-to-places when a writer wants full satisfactory in her writing, and when she wants to write with energy, truth and edge, according to Goldberg.

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\(^{41}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 15  
\(^{42}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 24  
\(^{43}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, 13 and 77  
\(^{44}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 13  
\(^{45}\) Ibid  
\(^{46}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 94  
\(^{47}\) Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 64
8.4 Writing despite fear

The question is, how do a writer perform good writing - how does she avoid blocking or writing boring? *Writing Down the Bones* offers plenty advice towards writing overall. The following advice is directed towards the blocking and boring texts that come out of fear (in other words, the book presents more advice than these):

1. Write as the creator (instead of as the editor)
2. Trust in your own voice
3. Allow yourself to write junk
4. Extend your boundaries
5. Write with and for other people (you are not alone)
6. Edit as a samurai

I elaborate on these in the following.

**Write as the creator (instead of as the editor)**

When I established Goldberg’s view on what we fear, I mentioned “the editor”. When a writer writes, the editor prevents burning through to first thoughts, the place of pure truth, energy and edge. Goldberg also mentions another “character” that a writer possesses, one that is actually helpful in her writing: the creator.

Even though she does not give a thorough definition of the creator, we find breadcrumbs in the text that reveal the creators voice. It lacks the editor and of criticism that want to prevent exposure and nakedness. The creator does the opposite: it creates: “Simply write it, note it, and drop to a deeper level and enter the story and take us into it.”

In one of the first chapters, Goldberg provides specific rules to how one can reach and write down the first thoughts. These are what a writer get a hold off, when she writes as the creator. She divides the rules into six:

1. Keep your hand moving.
2. Don’t cross out.
3. Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar.
4. Lose control.
5. Don’t think. Don’t get logical.

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48 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 45
49 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 97
6. Go for the jugular. (if something feels scary or naked, dive in)\textsuperscript{50}

When a writer follows these rules, she sets the editor on hold and allows the creator to work - or play.

**Trust in your own voice**

This is the most basic information Goldberg teaches, every time she teaches: “trusting your own mind and creating a confidence in your experience”\textsuperscript{51}. She mentions this in the book approximately 30 times, which is a great sign of how significant this is to her, and she states that trusting in your own voice is a key ingredient in good writing.\textsuperscript{52} She also states that it is important to listen to others opinions - and then make a decision. “It’s your poem and your voice.” she says, “it is a relationship with yourself. What is it you wanted to say? What do you want to expose about yourself?”\textsuperscript{53}

When a writer trusts her own voice, she was able to let her creativity pass through her - and she can direct it to whatever kind of writing she wants, Goldberg says.\textsuperscript{54}

**Allow yourself to write junk**

As mentioned earlier, writing with big expectations is a way to freeze in the writing. A way to work around this is to have very low expectations. Goldberg says to sit down and say, “I am free to write the worst junk in the world.”\textsuperscript{55} This will help unlock the block and release creativity. Or, it will at least help the writer write anything (maybe junk, which is a start, according to Goldberg).

**Extend your boundaries**

Goldberg mentions a group of students who were “very coherent”, and who “wrote complete sentences, were descriptive, detailed, and grounded.”\textsuperscript{56} After a while, Goldberg felt that their writing did not go anywhere. She does not say, that they were stuck in their safe structures because of fear - but the rest of her book suggest that they feared going into the electric, unknown space, and therefore their writing become boring. Her solution to this was that they should challenge themselves:

\textsuperscript{50} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 13  
\textsuperscript{51} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 9  
\textsuperscript{52} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 15  
\textsuperscript{53} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 94  
\textsuperscript{54} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 40  
\textsuperscript{55} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 15  
\textsuperscript{56} Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 77
“at some point in our lives we have to be crazy, we have to lose control, step out of our ordinary way of seeing, and learn that the world is not the way we think it is, that it isn’t solid, structured, and forever. (...) Go to the woods alone for three days. If you are terrified of horses, buy one and make friends with it. Extend your boundaries. Live on the edge for a while.”57

This would, in her hopes, make their lives “very vital, present, and alert right now.”58 And that would probably transform their writing into the similar.

**Write with and for other people (you are not alone)**

In the interview that Goldberg has included in the back of the book, she is asked: “What if someone is afraid of losing control?”59 To this, she suggests that a writer should write with other people. This will help the fearful feel supported and less alone60. This adds on to her encouraging voice as she points to other people, than only herself, as supportive in the writing process.

She also says that it is helpful to forget oneself for a while and write for other people. “If I think of myself, I get caught in myself, like everyone else.” she says. “ But if I forget myself, then I can do it.”61 What helped Goldberg return to finishing *Writing Down the Bones* was this exact thought. Fear had stopped her, and one day she broke down and thought to herself: “Nat, you have to do it for Katagiri, forget about yourself.” And that gave me the drive to do it.”62

**Edit as a Samurai**

After having let the creator “go wild”, Goldberg points to the danger of letting the editor come along and suffocate the energy.63 Instead, she suggests that when a writer rereads her texts, she “become a Samurai, a great warrior with the courage to cut out anything that is not present.”64 Or to add what the text needs to “bring your work closer to your mind’s picture.”65

This is to prevent the editor, the critic and the ego to take over. This is a way to let the creator, the first thoughts, the nakedness and the truth stay in there, while the writer finishes her work.

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57 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 77
58 Ibid
59 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 104
60 Ibid
61 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 105
62 Ibid
63 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 97
64 Ibid
65 Ibid
9. Discussion

In the discussion, I show where May’s five concepts of courage is similar to Goldberg’s viewpoints. In this, I include my own reflections, and I end with a reflection on a theme that neither May nor Goldberg touches.

Physical courage & Zen practice

May points to physical courage as the type of courage that makes a person dare to listen with the body, and he mentions yoga and meditation as cultivators for this kind of courage. Though Goldberg does not directly state this as a kind of courage, she argues that Zen practice has been a highly influential factor in her writing and one could suppose that without it, she might not even write.

This shows a similar understanding between May and Goldberg that practices like Zen, meditation and yoga can be very beneficial for the writing and for cultivating the necessary courage to write. If a person who practices these kinds of mental and bodily exercises acquire a calm nervous system and a focused mind, I see a tremendous advantage in practicing them.

Social courage & the fear of exposure

The social courage enables the ability to show yourself to another, according to May. Goldberg writes a great deal about the fear of being naked, which is a word that May also uses in his description of social courage. In Goldberg’s book, the courage to be naked includes that a writer trusts her own voice, her ability to reach and write first thoughts and letting her inner creator be in charge. She says, that a when writer dares show herself like this, she will write well.

Both May and Goldberg argues that hiding yourself is a behavior controlled by fear. But how does a person overcome the fear of vulnerability? May suggest alternating between solitude and solidarity - which I see as being introvert and extrovert. But how do a fearful person go the solidarity phase, when maybe all she wants is to hide away in the solitude phase, which might end up leading nowhere? Goldberg suggests writing with other people, and she presents the inner voices, the editor, internal censor and the critic. Goldberg’s basic advice is to write anyway - but is it that simple? For the person who is overloaded by fear, can she jump from the fear to “just do it” and expose herself without further help with, e.g. handling those inner voices?
Conviction and doubt - a paradox & writing in spite of fear

May states that doubting your creation not only natural, it is good for the process. It helps a writer stay open towards truth and the unlimited borders of perspective. Eventually the courage that is needed here will help the writer move forward despite fear. Even though Goldberg does not say the same about fear and doubt, she does have a point about the benefit of fear. She points to fear as a source of great texts - when the writer dares to expose herself in the writing. She also shows how she herself has experienced fear as a part of her writing process, and she says that fear are very common excuses why people do not let themselves write, even though that is what they want.

Based on this, I argue that Goldberg point to fear as natural in the writing process, just as May does. They both argue that fear and doubt is beneficial, however May states that this opens a creator towards truth, and Goldberg points to fear as a key to well written texts overall. I could not agree more. When you put your heart into something, it is vulnerable. It is for me, and for everyone I have talked to about this subject. No matter how sure of something a writer might be, if she reflects about the world and acknowledge that there are several opinions and that she does not control the outcome, no matter if she is doing her best when writing a text, there will probably be many times where she experiences doubt and fear of judgement from the world. However, the fear can be a great supporter in refining the text, if she dares to look at her own weaknesses.

Moral courage

May’s theory of moral courage points to the content of the creation. As I mentioned in the definition of this concept in chapter 7, moral courage can be texts that empathize with the sufferings of others by e.g. criticizing authorities and protecting minorities. Goldberg does not say anything about what good, or courageous, writing should include - her book can presumably be targeted to any type of writer. This does not mean that Goldberg would disagree on this matter, however she simply does not touch this theme in her Writing Down the Bones.

Writers who addresses these topics might risk a great deal. The example of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn is excellent. It shows how a writer who criticize people with power is a threat towards these, and it exemplifies how they can attempt to put a writer to silence. This kind of writing has a very understandable fear - the fear of losing one’s life, which is indeed something else than pride or fear of “just” losing face.

Creative courage

Creative courage is the use and findings of symbols in the creating act. May awards this type of courage as the most important kind. He assigns the creators, in this case, the writers, a position of obligation towards
the shaping of society. Goldberg speaks of writing in a less exalted manner and gives the impression that writing can be whatever a writer wants it to be.

**Courage as necessary in creating**

According to May’s theory, a creator of any kind must be courageous. Without courage, the writer cannot write, the painter cannot paint, and the singer cannot sing.

Goldberg says otherwise. She acknowledges that fear is a substantial showstopper, something that can create what she calls freezing (and what I would call blocking), but she says that it is possible to write with fear and without courage. This, however, makes the texts incredibly boring. Because when a writer is controlled by fear, she avoids writing what is vulnerable and what has edge. She ends up with rigid structure or, in other aspects, safe text that leads nowhere.

Without having done the research, I would say there is people in the world who create without feeling fear. May contradicts himself when he says, that creativity is creating overall and that it includes a certain kind of feeling of excitement. I do not suppose that every person on this planet, who creates something, feels that there is something at stake in the manner that May appoints it.

**Support of others**

What can a writer do, if she is fearful? When she doubts herself and fear the opinion of others? May says to evoke courage, Goldberg keeps it quite simple and says, “If you want to, write.” But how exactly can a fearful writer overcome the fear and evoke the courage?

I point to an important key in the writing process that has not been mentioned in neither theory nor empiri: the support of one person that follows the writers work closely - what you could call a writing coach.

Goldberg points to the value of writing with other people, and she is a writing teacher, which can be interpreted as an indirect attitude that inspiration from a live person is important. In addition, she has written a book that stands for supporting a writer through a writing process. May can help a writer become mentally aware of her own shortcomings and necessary components in the creating process. But how does a writer take this knowledge and transform it into action? None of them point to the sufficiency of having one person that the writer trusts, who can encourage the writer directly and give her reality checks whenever the fear and the inner judge overwhelm her.

66 Goldberg, *Bones*, p. 66
Most writers give a substantial thanks to their editor and/or other to people who have read their text and given feedback and inspiration through the book writing process. My hypothesis is that it is beneficial for a writer to be closely accompanied by a trusted supporter, one who has practical methods for unblocking, for opening up to the naked self. I am not saying that this would be the solution for anyone: some people work very well solo. However, the people who might read *Writing Down the Bones* might still need someone who could support them in taking the steps. Someone who has the voice of the creator, of courage and of support.
10. Conclusion

Through the project, both theory and empiri have confirmed a belief that fear and courage play a significant role in the act of writing. Where the theory by Rollo May says that courage is essential for a writer to be able to write, Natalie Goldberg claims that a writer can write without courage. When a writer writes from a fearful place, the result is just boring texts, according to her. However, they agree that when a writer fears, something of importance is at stake.

Where May points to the content of the text in form of empathy with others and/or symbols that are part of the shaping of society, Goldberg only speaks of the writing process and all kinds of texts as good, when they are written from an honest, vulnerable place.

What could be added to the theory and empiri is the value of a writing coach. A real live supporter that could help evoke courage and help the writer open up - despite fear.
11. The End

It might be obvious, but I will spell it out anyway. This project is also about my own experience when I write. I fear to write, and it often stops me. However, when I am able to look at where the fear points to, I can refine and improve the parts of my writing that leaves me insecure until I am satisfied, and my text becomes better.

This might not be very academic - to write a project that has roots so deeply in one's own challenges. This might leave a lot of blank spaces and blind angles. However. It might also be the very reason that academics of all sorts become passionate and study things in depth. Maybe most good academics find their subjects in themselves, in one way or another. Maybe that is actually being an excellent academic.

I admit that when Goldberg speaks of fear that makes a writer write boring texts, I nod in recognition. I know where I have been dominated by this through the project and where it shows itself through sections in the rapport. I also know where I trust my own voice, and where I come through clearly.

Regarding my tone of voice in this rapport: if I did not get a little creative in an academic project about releasing creativity, the study would not be that convincing, in my opinion. And I would not be courageous, for that matter.
12. Bibliography

Literature

Goldberg, Natalie, *Writing Down the Bones - Freeing the Writer Within*, 2010, Shambala


Websites

If you're feeling frustrated from writer's block, try these tips to get those creative juices flowing once again. Coming face to face with a block in your creativity and imagination can frequently lead to procrastination, disappointment and the feeling of being stuck in one place. It is an inevitable occurrence for those whose methods of expressing revolve around words. If you have made it this far in the article, chances are you are dealing with writer’s block at the moment. Therefore, there are two things you can do; you can be smart and visit a great service for buying research paper, meaning you won’t be dealing with writer’s block anymore, or you can just continue reading the rest of the article.