

## SUMMER WOOD

Albuquerque, NM

Literary GOF Recipient 2007 for Fiction

### ARTISTIC RESPONSE [EXCERPT]

**"Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time, the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics."**

Woolf had a blazing intellect, a gifted ear acutely tuned to the modulations of power and desire, and a sense of outrage appropriate to the conditions under which she, and generations of women before her, wrote. She understood that the liberty to create bold and original work depended not only on financial independence but on freedom from censorship as well, freedom from internal censorship as well as from that outwardly expressed. In these eighty years, we have come so much closer to mitigating these barriers. And it has freed many of us to be able to take the risks-- creative and otherwise-- that catapult us past those constraining walls and into the great big world where so many stories live.

But where are the stories of Lonnie's abuela? And why is it so often true that, in those cases where women do unexpected or unconventional things, we are apt to find them in literature—if we find them at all—caricatured, subtly denigrated, or sidelined from the action?

It's a complicated question, and way too big to tackle fully here. Consider this, though. Literature can function in much the same way that a house does. Stories—like houses—offer shelter. They can protect us from the hard and isolating winds of difference and change. They make a space for us to agree upon who we are. They make a home for us, you could say, in a difficult landscape. But like walls of brick and mortar, stories can confine us, too. They can shape our expectations, limit our sense of who we are and what we are capable of, tell us how far we should go and when we should stop. That's part of their didactic value in a traditional society. They build community, yes; but they also stake out the neighborhood. And sometimes that means excluding the ones who don't "belong."

Yes. . . *but*. Isn't it also true that the best stories can open their readers to what they had not otherwise thought possible? A really good story (like a really good poem, in Emily Dickinson's famous estimation) can blow the top of your head off. It can point to a reality—call it reflected or created or projected, it doesn't really matter—that can open you, gently or with extreme force, to your true stature.

Here's the crux, as I see it. Not only must a writer have financial independence and freedom from censorship, she's got to have *courage*. To write stories that powerful, she's got to be out in the world long enough to breathe in a big lungful of it, and then—with the magic that takes over when a fictive imagination stretches to its full capacity—she's got to take that slug of fresh air and turn it into something that stands true, even when it runs counter to our expectations.

But for a writer to be that brave, she needs to know—to believe firmly, and to be reminded often—that there are people out there for whom the truth matters, people who *need her stories*.

### WHAT DOES YOUR WRITING MEAN TO YOU? [EXCERPT]

You might as well ask me what my breathing means to me. No, better: what my loving means to me. It's as deeply rooted as that. It seems to spring from the same place, as subject to drought and flood, hope and fear and despair – desperation – and big fat juicy happiness. Extreme pleasure in the real and in the imaginary and an occasional acknowledged difficulty in seeing the difference between the two. I take a blue collar approach to both writing and love: you put in the time. You don't wait for inspiration to hit. You pack a lunch and get to work. You don't rest on your laurels

or expect that there's anyplace to get to. You give it everything you've got and then some, and then God – or whoever – kicks in, and kicks butt.

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