



Reader's Guide

from Sallie Bingham

author of *Mending*

Author Asks:

1. In my early stories, I am often writing about the hidden and the secret. Do you see the same interest in my later stories? Are there any secrets now?
2. I chose narrators who are outside the event, like the young husband in "The Wedding". But they are not detached observers. Why do I make this choice?
3. Mood is important to me, as in "Rachel's Island", where the island itself, its weather and landscape, inform the action. Can you think of an example of mood in your own writing, having this kind of powerful effect?
4. I often write of sexual initiation. In "August Ninth at Natural Bridge" and "The Banks of the Ohio" two different forms of initiation are described: that of the innocent girl, in the first story, who must be seduced—or raped—and that of the girl who takes charge, in the second story. Which girl seems more real, to you?
5. I often write of power struggles, more or less submerged, between men and women. Is this the meaning of the last line in "The Banks of the Ohio"?
6. I write from the point of view of sympathetic male characters, as in "The Ice Party". Are these men the movers of the action in the story, or are they responders?
7. I was trained as a writer to search for "le mot juste". Can you give an example? Is this choice important to you?
8. Why do you think there are so few children (not infants) in my stories?
9. When parents mourn the loss of a child, is there something self-indulgent going on? Is the mourning real, or for drama, in "Pleyben"?
10. Have you ever lived in a foreign country, or learned a second language? What is the importance of learning French to the girl in "Sag-esse"?

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Writing Exercises:

1. Try to write a paragraph from the point of view of an imagined character you find unsympathetic: find a way inside his/her skin. How do you achieve this transformation?
2. Write about a historical event (Vietnam, the Depression) from the point of view of a character who lived through some aspect of the event, or its consequences.
3. Using a few words of an imaginary language, write dialogue for a character in a foreign country, trying to order a meal.

Further Reading:

When Everything Changed: the Women's Movement from the 1960's to the Present, Gail Collins
The Kentucky Anthology, editor Wade Hall.
Reading Jesus, Mary Gordon
I am an Emotional Creature, Eve Ensler
Winter's Tales, Isak Dinesen