

DOI 10.2478/doc-2022-0002

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Writing Differently about
Scholarly Issues: Defending
Our Voices and Inviting
the Reader

Article history:

Received	28 August 2022
Revised	10 November 2022
Accepted	18 November 2022
Available online	30 December 2022

Abstract: This paper addresses an ethical issue which comes into play when a scholar sits down to write an article. It concerns rhetorical strategies traditionally employed in top-tier academic journals, specifically in business and management, which efface a unique authorial voice and are reader exclusive. To reclaim authorial voice and embrace the reader's presence in text construction, we propose approaching scholarly writing as a dialogue between the writer and the reader, an emotional engagement which includes aspects of the notion of 'tenderness' coined by Olga Tokarczuk (2019, 2020). Writing with tenderness enables authors to engage with readers in a way that helps them unite fragments of text into a single coherent design.

Because in our digitalised and globalised world, there is a lack of universal values the writer could draw on to craft arguments convincing for the reader, we need to search for new ways to narrate our lives. Our approach involves the inclusion of what Tokarczuk (2019) calls 'structures of mythology' which are conceived of as values fundamental for human lives and allow for a wide range of content-dependent interpretations. Incorporating aspects of 'tenderness' in the process of text production will have important impact on the utility, accessibility, relevance, quality and global reach of scholarly writing.

Key words: authorial voice, reader-inclusion, dialogue, tenderness, mythology

"I go back to the reading room, where I sink in the sofa and into the world of *The Arabian Nights*. Slowly, like a movie fadeout, the real world evaporates. I'm alone, inside the world of the story. My favourite feeling in the world."

Haruki Murakami

We begin this paper by citing one of literature's most famous story telling events which features Scheherazade, a renowned storyteller who, by making the most of her narrative skills, keeps a murderous Pasha so enchanted that he eventually stops his nightly ritual of murdering a young maid and marries her instead. The 1,000 tales with which Scheherazade bewitched the Pasha are to be found in *One Thousand And One Nights* which has had many reincarnations from its origins in the 10th century to modern day writing. Although it is impossible to identify a single dominant literary or rhetorical device which serves to attract and engage the Pasha and the reader, the durability of the text is surely testimony to its effectiveness as a piece of engaging literature.

The listener/reader engagement in the text has also its more lethal side: failure to do so leads to dire consequences, convince or perish. In this sense, John Barth, an American fiction writer, sees Scheherazade's situation as a metaphor for every author's predicament: the Pasha, the total arbiter of what is deemed to be of interest or value, symbolises the reader who has the power to reject or criticise the writer's efforts (Barth, 1984). Similarly, Gordon Lish, a famous editor for *Esquire* who helped the careers of many American writers and yet was a severe critic of their works, was also a teacher of writing and would not allow his students to continue reading their work if the opening sentence failed to capture his interest. A typical evaluation was: "I don't feel like I need to know this to keep on living" (Bowman, 1998). However, Lish did not consider the necessary means by which writers acquire the literary skills needed to enchant the reader. He believed they were learnt through exposure, acceptance and application of certain rhetorical strategies; in essence, the result of "perseverance, application, industry, assiduity, will, will, will, desire, desire, desire" (Bowman, 1998).

To summarise the point of the above anecdotes, any text, whether literary or academic, is interesting and engaging only in so far as its reader deems it so and the literary skills necessary to engage the reader are learnt through exposure and application. In all writing, it is key to keep an audience, usually a demanding one, constantly in mind to forestall potential criticisms or rejection. However, of the relationship between writer and reader in scholarly texts, it has been noted that across academic disciplines authors tend to "build barricades to keep readers out rather than open doors to invite them in" (Tourish, 2020, p. 105).

The increasing criticism – levelled at the quality of much writing in scientific journals – is the best evidence that scholarly writing is notoriously not reader-friendly and academic prose typically employs an impersonal style, bejewelled with technical language (Grey, & Sinclair, 2006; Kiriakos, & Tienari, 2018; Gilmore et al., 2019; Pullen et al., 2020; Tourish, 2020). In many academic contexts, and in particular in writing on business and management, the necessity of the effective use of rhetorical strategies in text production has not been fully appreciated. The main criticisms include the lack of engagement with a wider readership's needs and interests (including non-Anglophone scholars, junior researchers and doctoral students), with the dominance of texts which are inward looking and reflective (Hambrick, 2007). What is more, the use of language is often over-technical, complex, obscurantist and lifeless and a writing style is formulaic, jargon-ridden, authoritative, thereby limiting any impact on a wider readership (Grey, & Sinclair, 2006; Bridgman, & Stephens, 2008).

Indeed, there is an urgent need for new ways of articulation to be employed when writing about scholarly research. The cornerstone of this belief is the need to defend the presence of our own voices in what we write and understanding that effective writing is a dialogue between the reader and the writer (Helin, 2016; Meier, & Wegener, 2017). Following the work of Grafström and Jonsson (2020) and other Critical Management Scholars, we call for “defending and nurturing our own voices in academic texts” (Grafström, & Jonsson, 2020, p. 119) and resisting repeating “the impersonal and sterile ways in which academic texts tend to be written, leav[ing] little room for artistic expression, creativity or [...] passion or feelings” (2020, p. 121). In this way, we will resist being put in “the transcendental position of deracinated, disembodied and unemotional beings, as required by contemporary academic norms of what classifies an academic in a business school, what counts in terms of research performance, that these indicators mark who we can become in this space, and what we can say” (Gilmore et al., 2019, p. 4).

Reader-considerate writing is akin to the notion of ‘tender narrator’ coined by Olga Tokarczuk (2019, 2020), Nobel Laureate in Literature. Writing with ‘tenderness’ enables authors to “tell stories honestly in a way that activates a sense of the whole in the reader’s mind, that sets off the reader’s capacity to unite

fragments into a single design” (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 22). Textual ‘tenderness’ is based on the relationship that the writer establishes with the reader in which “The Author and the Reader perform equivalent roles, the former by dint of creating, the latter by making a constant interpretation” (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 22).

‘Tenderness’ contributes to textual dialogicality in the sense that authors carry out an internal conversation in which they consider reader’s reaction in response to the unfolding text by posing and acting upon the questions: “How do I rhetorically recognize my readers’ presence and include them as active discourse participants?”, “How do I allow them the space to dispute or critically interpret the propositional content I present?”

Despite the importance of ‘tenderness’ in all aspects of our lives, the real concern today is how to find values which would be of universal significance and would lay the grounds for developing tenderness in interpersonal communication. In the pre-digitalised and pre-globalised era, people were able to signal a sense of unity, community cohesion and respect for others by appealing to the unified set of values, practices and beliefs that held nations and communities together. The vast and varied amounts of available information we have at our disposal today blur the boundaries between what is good and bad, right or wrong, worth fighting for or protecting. As a result, the enormity of this information “instead of uniting, generalizing and freeing, has differentiated, divided, enclosed in individual little bubbles, creating a multitude of stories that are incompatible with one another or even openly hostile toward each other, mutually antagonizing” (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 9). It is not surprising then that it is becoming more and more challenging to convincingly narrate the stories of our digitalised and globalised lives as the values and points of view which used to keep communities together are increasingly less identifiable. Recognising this, Tokarczuk suggests, “Returning to the compact structures of mythology could bring a sense of stability within the lack of specificity in which we are living nowadays. I believe that myths are the building material for our psyche, and we cannot possibly ignore them (at most we might be unaware of their influence)” (2019, p. 23).

True as these words may sound, they require some elaboration. The term ‘myth’ is very vague and impossible to define without specifying particular

domains of human experience within existing theories based on different approaches, such as ethno-cultural, religious, literary, psychological, sociological, political and quite a few more. Laying aside endless discussions concerning the nature and senses of the word 'myth', it appears that most relevant to our present concerns is the fact that myths, like metaphors, are molded in specific socio-cultural contexts and understanding them requires appropriate, adequate background knowledge. Moreover, they both determine our understanding and convictions concerning the reality in which we live. Whether metaphors and myths mold our thinking or our thinking molds metaphors and myths is a futile, egg-or-chicken, bi-directional dilemma, like two sides of the same coin in which one side cannot exist without the other. What really matters is the fact that abstractions are conceptualized as concrete things and myths are alive as long as they relate to concrete events, including our convictions, evaluations, opinions and attitudes. In view of this, Lakoff and Johnson's famous phrase (and the title of their book) *Metaphors we live by* can be supplemented by the phrase *Myths we live by* as a title of an easy to envisage book.

Metaphors and myths determine our interpretations of whatever we experience which, of course, includes spoken and written texts as elements of discourses. This leads us directly to the theme of the present issue of *Discourses on Culture* entitled: "Writing differently about scholarly issues." In view of what was said above, we wish to suggest that one can approach this problem from the point of view of the reader and reformulate the topic as "Reading the same texts differently." This is illustrated by books respectively authored by a world-famous biologist and an ardent atheist, Richard Dawkins, and a reputed physicist and devout theist, Michał Heller. The two books, Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006) and Heller's *Wszechświat jest tylko drogą. Kosmiczne Rekolekcje* [Eng. *The Universe is only a Road. The Cosmic Retreat*] (2012), are similar in that although they were written by experts in their respective sciences, they are intended to reach a wide spectrum of readers. For this reason, the two writers do not use esoteric specialised language varieties involving mathematical formalism, but adopt a reader-friendly rhetorical style.

However, the two books are written by authors confessing two opposing 'myths', which could be respectively referred as the 'myth of atheism' and the

'myth of theism.' It is clear that were a case study to be carried out by linguists to test readers' reactions to the two texts, the result would yield the following working hypothesis: "While atheists react negatively to Heller's book, theists react negatively to Dawkins' book, and conversely." Thus, it seems that readers' reactions are determined by their initial convictions and attitudes more than by what the authors of the texts intend to convey to their readers. This observation seems to point to the fact that convictions based on faith in some myths are more stable and contribute to a reader's reception of a text more than pre-existing knowledge. This phenomena of readers engaging differently with texts is being explored by respective authors in the present issue of *Discourses on Culture*.

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