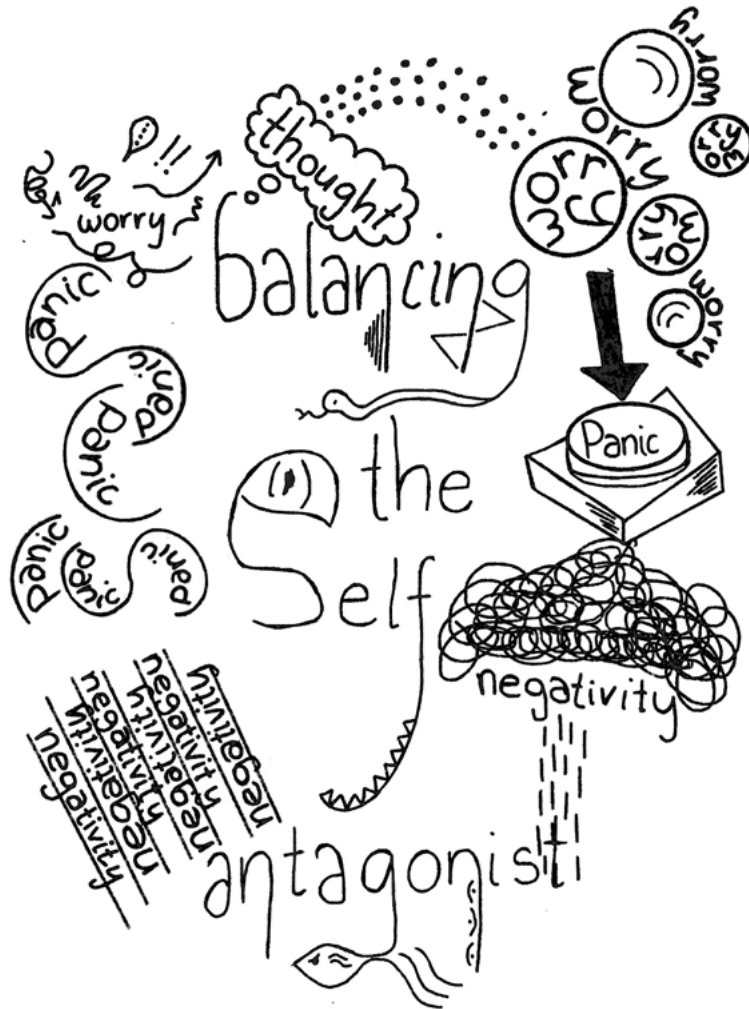


Zine Verschenken

#16 | november 2023 | antagonist



Editorial



As we relinquish the last few days of warm weather, it's natural to turn to a more retrospective mode. This is why we chose antagonists as this month's theme.

We each have an ongoing story of our life and with it come the antagonists.

From a writer's perspective, there are four types of antagonists; the villain, the conflict creator, inanimate forces and yourself.

The classic villain can exist in particular stories, or we can paint a person as a villain from the fragments we see of their personality. They may be an employer or a colleague, or a bully from an extended group of friends. One way to manage this type of character is to try to imagine a part of their life where they might struggle. Envision a part of their own conflict story. It may start to humanise them and make them more tolerable, which may lead to you feeling as though you have defeated them by rising above.

The conflict creator is someone who is generally a good person to be around. These are the types that tell you the truth. They ask the difficult questions and hold you accountable. They can also be the ones who stick around to resolve the conflict with you. We could all take a turn playing conflict creator from time to time. It can help keep us and others around us honest. Aren't there moments in life where you directed your conflict straight at the person in question and were able to resolve it? Rather than the times you kept it to yourself, or spread it to those around you and avoided person you needed to address?

Inanimate objects can also play the part of the antagonist. Although there is not much we can do to avoid these physical obstacles in life, they can teach us an important life lesson. Some things in life can't be changed and there will be times when everything seems to be against us. It's ok to put it all on pause, say no or even cancel. Learning that the now isn't where your task starts and ends will earn you valuable patience.

Finally, the most powerful antagonist of all, yourself. In many ways, the previous three can also be adapted, depending on your perspective. Your outlook can hold the most power in any of the ways an antagonist could seep in and affect your story. Naturally, we aren't always going to see it in the moment, but as you adapt to the colder season, take a look at your antagonists over the past year and whether you took part as one of them. These personal reflections can help us grow and, in time, allow us to stop being our own antagonists in order to reach our goals.



The ultimate antagonist

Sometimes we refer to our better nature, the other part of ourselves, our alter ego: aspects of our character that come to the fore, only to recede into the recesses of our being, in a sudden bout of self-consciousness, embarrassment, mortification even. Often, these voices speak to us when we least expect it, when we don't want to pay heed to them; they struggle to be heard. Our inner voice(s), facets of our psyche, fight with one another and with our superficial, conventional, ordinary, edited selves. They antagonise us, argue the toss, play havoc with our thoughts, disturbing our peace of mind. Nevertheless, these irrepressible, antagonistic fragments of our being also make us who we really are and, sooner or later, float to the surface of our consciousness. They are the movers and shakers of our existence, catalysts for personal truth, freedom and serenity. More often than not, they take unforeseeable twists and turns, meddling with our fate.

I have known few young people who have wanted to lay themselves bare, run wild with their own untried and untested ideas while defying the temptations of crass materialism, personal ambition, prevailing cultural winds and ultimately self-preservation, in the pursuit of experience for experience's sake as did Christopher Hayden-Delaney, friend and former student of literature and creative writing at Berlin University, now sadly deceased.

Chris was creative in every sense of the word. He listened, he thought, he questioned, he challenged; he went off on a tangent, he wandered (and wondered) full circle and around again; he bore the brunt of it, was conflicted by it, yet he wholeheartedly embraced it - and to hell with everything else!

He was the ultimate antagonist. On the cusp of becoming a writer, he noted his observations, imaginings and responses to his environment in the moment, with absolute integrity. On the written page, as in life, there can be no story, no plot, no resolution without the antagonist to act as a foil, positively or negatively: uplifting or suppressing emotions, engaging in or circumventing events, suffering or avoiding the consequences, fighting or upholding instinct and intuition.

Antagonists are free spirits, and Chris was certainly one of those, as his 'Writing beyond the Boundaries' attests:

'I am the lake'

Sometimes you find yourself acting inexplicably, following gut instinct that opposes logic and threatens to undo months of hard work just to prove the point: "This is my life, not yours. I have choices."

My housemate had met a group of twenty-something people in their twenty-somethings. Beautiful and free, they travelled around Europe like a flock of wild birds, singing on the streets for food before moving through Berlin to Lithuania for a gathering in the forest. It was quite by chance that he bumped into them and offered our house to be theirs too. Bizarre as it was to return from work at 3 am to find a group of spirited strangers at the dining table, I could feel the energy: they were special.

Over the next week, we celebrated this new collective and became close friends. On the hot summer days we busked around Berlin, each with an instrument, creating an almighty sound as we raised money for the glorious suppers that marked our evenings. By day we were a flock of fabulous, free birds, our vibrant plumage standing out against the grey backdrop of the city; by night we slept, coiled like snakes in the stifling heat. Quickly we became a force of friendship, laughter, joy and affection.

Before long, we'd arrived at the 'last supper' - our largest dinner to date was on the 'bird table', a banquet where we drank and feasted, grateful that fate had joined us together. Next morning, as the city sweltered under an intense sun, the group exchanged goodbyes, wishes of luck, love and promises of reunions in the future. A dawn chorus one one minute, silence the next. The energy was tangible. Swift as the breeze that blew them in, they were gone. The house back down to its usual few felt empty, a bustling hive now deserted.

Shaking my feathers, I thought "Ah, it'd be great to go with them". An impending loss of freedom under the tyranny of my work schedule awakened an unstoppable urge: a desire to spread my own wings, disappear into the forest, follow the flock and face the consequences of my departure later on. It was decided. I would take flight.

I packed a small bag and took off, hitchhiking across Germany, Poland and on through the night to the north of Lithuania. Luck on my side and a fair wind behind me, I found the journey quicker than imagined, friendly drivers amazed to hear of a last minute dash from eastern Germany to the beyond, as far as the crow flies.

Finally, I arrived at the village that held the path into the forest. A hot July sun illuminated the leaves of the canopy above, and the little mandala signs that marked the direction to the centre of the gathering: a fire circle. Before me, the trees opened up to a patchwork of green hills stretching out to the horizon, as the sun baked down on the lush forest, free from the imprint of man - Wild!

Entering the natural clearing lined with wild flowers - a walkway of pinks, azures and indigo - I eventually came to the main fire where a hundred fellow travellers sat, chirping amongst themselves, waiting to share their supper. I was filled with bliss. The sight of all of my friends gathered in one place brought a sense of peace. I felt at home, certain I'd made the right decision.

The sound of my name being shouted jolted me from my reverie. I turned and the flock I'd followed was suddenly flying towards me, a blur of scarves and bright plumage, faces smiling, surprised, elated. We embraced happily, the glade ringing with our laughter and fluttering commotion.

After supper the sun began to sink and the sky turned to a watercolour of glowing amber, streaked with hot pinks and purples, crimson and violet. Below it, the forest was masked with a haze that cut us off from civilisation, giving us a place to call our own, hidden away in ancient woods.

Next morning, just after sunrise, I found myself by the lakeside. Perfectly still, reeds and grasses lining its banks, I was alone in the silent, powerful landscape. I waded into the cold, refreshing water and a sense of liberation coursed through me... a dragonfly hovered... As I began to float, my senses came alive and my mind spoke: "I am the lake."

Christopher Hayden-Delaney

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Do you want to contribute to the zine?
Have any questions?
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