

Latinidad – May 2006: The Revision Process

Contents:

1. Saludos: The Revision Process
2. Q&A: Jotham Burrello
3. Upcoming Workshops: What Editors Want Workshop
4. Writing Opportunities: Disney/ABC Seeks Writers of Color

For more writing opportunities, including calls for submissions, contests and conferences, visit <http://www.marcelalandres.com/> and click on Writing Opportunities.

1. Saludos

Completing a manuscript makes you an aspiring writer; polishing a manuscript turns you into a professional. If you've ever submitted a first or second draft of a manuscript to an agent or editor and wondered why it was rejected, you need to master the revision process. To that end, I enthusiastically recommend the DVD "So, Is It Done? Navigating the Revision Process" to every writer, beginner and beyond. Learn more by checking out the Q&A below with producer Jotham Burrello. Note: Latinidad readers can receive a 20% discount off the retail price when ordering online at: <http://www.erpmedia.net/discount.html>.

Helping Latino writers get published,

Marcela Landres

marcelalandres@yahoo.com

<http://www.marcelalandres.com/>

2. Q&A

Jotham Burrello is an adjunct professor in the Fiction Writing Department at Columbia College where he directs the Publishing Lab, a center to assist writers in finding homes for their stories. He has a BA from Indiana University and an MFA from Columbia College. His writing has appeared in various journals including Pennsylvania English, Sudden Stories, Cymbals, and the Christian Science Monitor. At work on his second novel, he is the former editor of the literary journal Sport Literate. His media company, Elephant Rock Productions, published the anthology All Hands On, The 2nd Hand Reader plus produced two writing DVD titles.

Many beginning writers don't trust their own insight or editing skills. How can "So, Is It Done?" help them develop the confidence and ability to self-edit?

On the DVD writer Ron Carlson explains he just doesn't pick up a pencil and say, "I'm gonna make this story better." Writers need to develop strategies to attack a manuscript. It's what we call process—on the DVD we get specific. The DVD breaks down the revision process into five rounds that present strategies for revision. Exercises on the disc

correspond to each round. After watching the program writers will be armed with strategies to reshape their stories.

For example, host Janet Burroway gives two examples of concrete significant detail. The entire close-up section in round three is devoted to it. As Burroway says on the DVD, “fiction comes alive with concrete significant detail.” Writers should understand the importance of the terms “concrete” and “significant” and strive for both. I see too much summary and general description in student manuscripts. Force yourself to “see it” as your characters see it so readers can see and experience your stories.

Recognizing the shortcomings of your own fiction or creative nonfiction is a difficult task. Even the published authors on the DVD acknowledge they struggle but what sets them apart is that they have action plans or tricks to identify and “fix” the problems. This takes many years, and we’re always learning, because each story presents unique challenges. And sometimes stories don’t work. For every published story a writer might have three to four that aren’t published. Remember stories are never finished, simply abandoned. Of course it’s nice to abandon them in magazines or books. We all want that.

Writing is a solitary and private act; writing workshops are communal and public. Why, then, are writing workshops highly recommended as part of the revision process?

Was it Emerson who said you can’t see the field from within the field? We all need teachers and peers to create art. And I’m not talking about taking verbatim feedback and putting it into your story. Sometimes it’s what’s not said in a feedback session that gets you thinking.

There are generative workshops and critique-based workshops. The former are more focused on getting it out and the latter are equipped to steer revision. I think both are necessary, but the critique needs to always remain focused on the work and not the writer. When getting feedback writers should listen to everyone and then make decisions based on what the story needs. On the DVD I interview writer Ken Foster (and we visit his class) and discuss running a workshop, how writers should participate, read manuscripts and receive feedback. We also have a four-page guide for running a workshop. Establishing certain ground rules helps save time and egos.

Lastly, workshops and writing groups help writers build a social community of like-minded folks that can assist one other in placing stories in magazines, or setting up readings, or discussing revisions, or books, etc. We’re a nation of interest groups. Why not start your own writing group at a local café? I’m attending a meeting of writers this evening. We’ve been at it for five years. I think it’s my turn to bring the vino.

What are the five most common mistakes writers make when revising their work?

1. To paraphrase Faulkner, an inability to kill our darlings. Many stories start from a frenzied journal entry unleashed from a bit of overheard gossip at Starbucks, or from a dream, or a New York Times dispatch from New Orleans . . . inspiration for first drafts is exciting. We write for ourselves or perhaps for an audience initially. But after you’ve completed a first draft—written a beginning, middle and end—you must shift gears and look at the work with a lens of detachment. This is hard to do. But you must begin to ask

questions of the work and make changes based on what the work needs, and not on what you, the writer, wants to happen to your hero or what your sister will think is funny. Too many writers don't make this shift. In revision prioritize the work, then self, and audience. As writer William Knott wrote in his book *The Craft of Fiction*, "anyone can write—and almost everyone you meet these days is writing. However, only the writers know how to rewrite. It is this ability alone that turns the amateur into a pro."

2. Lack of plot. I read a lot of good student stories but very few well plotted stories. And don't think of plot as simply a genre term. We all want to be entertained. I suggest once you've completed a solid draft chart the events described in your scenes and ask two simple questions: How does the action in this scene lead to the next? Is the drama increasing?

3. Show, don't tell. [See concrete significant detail comment above]

4. Find the Save As key in your word processing program and use it often. Stories take months, sometimes years, to evolve. And by numbering or collecting drafts you can later reflect the evolution of your story, but most importantly each time you sit down you will give yourself a fresh start. You won't be messing with your initial inspiration simply reshaping it into a plot. I'm currently on draft twenty-five of a story I am revising.

5. A teacher once told me, real life is no excuse for bad fiction. Translation: just because an event happened to you or cousin Freddy doesn't make it dramatic. Every writer uses personal or observed or told experiences to create fiction but published writers build on real events and embellish and dramatize to create new worlds and characters. Use "real life" for inspiration, not as the entire basis for a story. As Dorothy Parker said in a 1959 interview with Studs Terkel, "You can't put down what everybody says, you'd be bored stiff."

There are countless books, magazines, and web sites designed to help writers--why did you choose the DVD format, and how does it complement the other resources available to writers?

I have an entire bookshelf of writing texts, and I own just a tiny fraction of what book publishers are pumping out each year. We don't need another book on craft but a multimedia tool seemed like a nice alternative. The DVD format allows the mixing of video and text (PDF files) so in a sense you get the best of both worlds. (You can't do this on VHS or CD-ROM.) Our DVD includes a 121-page book of stories from the participants. You can hear Robert Olen Butler discuss significant detail then read a story from his Pulitzer Prize winning collection. This is a huge advantage of the DVD technology. Plus there are exercises corresponding to each round of revision.

I wanted to give writers access to published writers discussing their craft "live." This very rarely happens at public panels or readings (and when it does it usually is in response to omnibus questions like "what's your writing process?" that can't be answered in thirty seconds). Plus there are hundreds of textbooks on the topic of writing but few that concentrate on revision. It's a complicated process and very personal (we all know what we do well and not so well), so by showing writers in their homes or writing retreats we can "see" their revision strategies.

I wanted to work with the renowned writer and educator Janet Burroway. I'm a big admirer of her textbook, *Writing Fiction* and thought we could take on the revision chapter. But I knew of course that discussing revision involved a rehashing of setting, characterization, POV, voice, the whole ball of wax. Janet presents material in a manner that's accessible and motivating. She's a terrific lady.

Lastly, I think folks learn in different ways. Some of us are visual beasts, others auditory, etc. I am hoping to engage younger writers who don't get psyched about textbooks but rather respond to multimedia to spark their creativity. That said I wasn't going to do the project without examples of good writing, thus the inclusion of the e-book. I think of the video on the DVD as a gateway to reading.

In addition to being a video producer, you teach creative writing and are a writer. How has your writing background inspired and influenced "So, Is It Done?"

Writing stories and books is the hardest thing I've ever done. But I believe if I keep after it someday I'll produce solid prose. Of course it takes more than craft to create memorable stories but knowing strategies to revise manuscripts helps when inspiration hits.

I've edited a literary journal, published stories, taught creative writing, and produced how-to or instructional videos for over 15 years with educators at Indiana University. So these DVDs were my first chance to merge my technical background as a video guy with my writing interest. On this project I shot some interviews, edited the tape, as well as co-wrote the script, and conducted the interviews. Plus, I wanted to provide a product for my writing students. They were my guiding light in the editing room. What I've found is that writers at all levels need reminding and strategies for revising their fiction and creative nonfiction.

Buy the DVD: Latinidad readers can receive a 20% discount off the retail price when ordering online at: <http://www.erpmedia.net/discount.html> .

3. Upcoming Workshops

What Editors Want Workshop

WHAT: The difference between writers who get book deals and those who don't isn't talent—it's knowledge. Topics discussed include: why writing conferences are a better investment than M.F.A. programs; the supreme importance of a platform, and how to create one; and the three most common mistakes writers make when pursuing a writing career. (This workshop can be taken in conjunction with the Achy Obejas workshop; visit <http://www.toltecatl.com.mx/> for more information.)

WHEN: Saturday, June 24

WHERE: Sayulita, a beach town on the Pacific Coast of Mexico

REGISTER: Please visit <http://www.toltecatl.com.mx/> .

Invite me to speak for your organization: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id49.htm>

List of upcoming workshops: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id22.htm>

4. Writing Opportunities

When you contact these organizations, please mention that you were referred by the Latinidad Newsletter. Thank you, and let me know what happens.

DISNEY/ABC SEEKS WRITERS OF COLOR

Deadline: June 23

The Writing Fellowship Program from Walt Disney and ABC Studios is looking for new writing talent. Writers with experience in playwriting, screenwriting and television writing are encouraged to apply, especially women and minorities. Applications must include resume, autobiography and a writing sample of a screenplay, stage play, or television script. If accepted, candidates would be required to locate in the Los Angeles area during the fellowship. For more information, visit <http://www.abctalentdevelopment.com/> .

NORTH COUNTRY INSTITUTE FOR WRITERS OF COLOR

Dates: June 11-16

The North Country Institute for Writers of Color provides emerging writers of color (poets, fiction writers, and creative non fiction writers) in urban areas with an opportunity to attend a six day writing retreat where they will receive writing instruction and conference with writing faculty and workshop leaders in a facility overlooking Lake Champlain in northeastern New York. For more information, visit <http://www.plattsburgh.edu/offices/academic/writersofcolor/valcourretreat.php> .

THE WRITER SHORT MEMOIR CONTEST

Deadline: June 30

Seeking essays about meaningful personal experiences. First prize is \$1000 plus publication in The Writer magazine. Judge is Peter M. Leschak, author of The Bear Guardian. For more information, visit <http://www.writermag.com/wrt/default.aspx?c=a&id=2825>.

LATINO SCREENPLAY COMPETITION

Deadline: July 15

Announcing the first Annual Latino Screenplay Competition (LSC). Now accepting feature-length and short screenplays for consideration for cash prizes and other awards. The mission of the LSC is to cultivate a greater interest in Latino-themed screenplays and promote talented screenwriters of Latino-themed scripts in Hollywood. Apply at WithoutABox.com and save \$5! It is NOT requirement that the screenwriter be Latino,

but the script must maintain some aspect of Latino life, culture and/or its people. Visit <http://www.latinoscreenplaycompetition.com/> for more information.

CALL FOR ASSOCIATE EDITORS AND WRITERS

Sable Magazine is seeking Volunteer Associate Editors of Latin, Asian and Native American descent to join their Editorial Board in an effort to adequately represent all segments of the demographic they aim to reach. They are also seeking steady contributors for the following departments: Travel, Sports, Health and Fitness, and Arts & Leisure. If interested in either position, please send a cover letter and resume along with a writing sample via email to Editor-in-Chief Susan A. Webley at editor@sablemagazine.com. For more info about the magazine please visit <http://www.sablemagazine.com/>.

LISTEN & BE HEARD WEEKLY SEEKS ETHNIC WRITERS

Listen & Be Heard Weekly is seeking an array of ethnic and cultural voices to help fulfill the promise of diversity. Volunteers are needed to write: Jazz reviews of CDs and/or live shows, spa reviews, dance & theatre reviews, live music & concert reviews, health & fitness column, movie reviews of popular and/or art films, and arts in the schools. If interested in any of these positions, please send a 400-600 word sample to Martha at editor@listenandbeheard.net. For more information, visit <http://www.listenandbeheard.net/>.

SEEKING POEMS IN TRANSLATIONS

Languageandculture.net, an online poetry journal, welcomes original poetry and their English translation in the following languages: Spanish, French, German, Russian, Italian and the Slavic languages. They accept translations of known writers; please include the original language. Poems and their translations are both published. Please visit <http://languageandculture.net/> for submission guidelines.

AY, MIJA! WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE AN ENGINEER?

Ay, Mija! Why Do You Want to be an Engineer? is for the young adult market. The book features twelve Latina engineers from around the country, telling their stories of when they were young girls and what inspired them to go into engineering, a career not traditionally sought by young Latinas. Out of about three million engineers in the U.S., less than 1% are Latinas. The book provides positive role models for all young adults, especially minority students and is the first book in a series of Ay, Mija! and Ay, Mijo! books planned to provide role models students can identify with. To purchase books and for more information, visit <http://3noseybroads.com/mija/index.html>.

CHICK LIT WORKSHOP

The Chick Lit Workshop at ¡Azúcar! Para el Espíritu located in Miami, FL is open to anyone interested in writing contemporary women's literature. Later on two more general workshops will be opened, one in Spanish and the other in English, which are for those individuals interested in writing fiction. Critique work will be done in class therefore

most of the writing should be done outside of class. Register by calling 305-646-8003 or emailing azucar2005@bellsouth.net . Visit <http://www.azucarparaelespiritu.com/> for more information.

CRITICAS MAGAZINE SEEKS BILINGUAL EDITOR

Críticas magazine, a monthly online magazine with two print editions and an online monthly newsletter, seeks an editor, bilingual in Spanish and English, to work on this award-winning publication. Críticas: An English Speaker's Guide to the Latest Spanish Language Titles (<http://www.criticasmagazine.com/>) is geared primarily toward book buyers in the library and bookstore markets. It covers the burgeoning Spanish-language U.S. market through reviews of books, video, and audio, as well as publishing news and stories on service trends in bookstores and libraries and author interviews. The ideal candidate will be fluent in both English and Spanish, possess a deep interest in and understanding of Latino/a culture in the U.S., and have at least two years editing, reporting, and/or library experience. She or he will work closely with Library Journal magazine, of which Críticas is a part, as well as represent Críticas in the national and international community. Please submit resume and salary requirements to Rebecca Miller at miller@reedbusiness.com.

NOMINATE WWW.MARCELALANDRES.COM

If you like my web site, please nominate it for next year's Writer's Digest Magazine's "The 101 Best Web Sites for Writers" list. Send nominations to writersdig@fwpubs.com with "101 Best Web Sites" as the subject line and include a brief note explaining how <http://www.marcelalandres.com/> has helped you. Thank you in advance for your support!

CONSULTATIONS

I edit manuscripts, critique proposals and advise on how to launch and maintain a successful writing career. If you are interested in a consultation, please visit <http://www.marcelalandres.com/> , click on Consultations, and follow the instructions.

POST AN ANNOUNCEMENT IN LATINIDAD

E-mail announcements about contests, calls for submissions, conferences, jobs, book publications, literary events, etc., to marcelalandres@yahoo.com.

CHANGE E-MAIL ADDRESS/READ BACK ISSUES

To change your e-mail address and/or to read back issues of Latinidad visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marcelalandres/>.

REPRINTS

If you wish to reprint portions of Latinidad, please credit The Latinidad Newsletter and include a link to <http://www.marcelalandres.com/>

DID YOU LIKE THIS NEWSLETTER?

If so, forward it to friends and colleagues. If not, fill out the Newsletter Survey on <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id59.htm> and tell me what doesn't work and why.

“The pain of the discipline is short, but the glory of the fruition is eternal.”—Harriet Beecher Stowe

The Latinidad™ Newsletter © 2003 by Marcela Landres

Marcela Landres
Editorial Consultant
718-208-5810
marcelalandres@yahoo.com
<http://www.marcelalandres.com/>
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marcelalandres/>
Helping writers get published.