**Creative Writing 14 March 2018 2-4 pm, Calvert Library, Prince Frederick MD**

**Sorry I am late in getting out a few prompts which might jump start your own writing. I broke my shoulder in early January which has slowed down our process of moving directly from the ER of Calvert hospital to the tip of Solomon, and organizing is an on-going dilemma. Increasingly mobile, amid the upheavals, I am stealing time to scribble and decipher and re-work-work-work new and ongoing stories, poems and articles. A few ego-trips also –spurred me to keep on (such as big piece in the Valentine's Day *Bay Weekly*, etc.**

**I know that some of you are likewise writing against the clock and calendar, so like Dylan Thomas and a host of other writers, let us write on, and on…and with luck and persistence--**

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***Onyx Moon*, by J.H. Beall, is winner of the 2018 Willliam Meredith Foundation Award for Poetry. The book was published in January of 2018 by New Academia Publishing, Washington, DC, and is available via Barnes and Noble, Amazon, and[newacademia.com](newacademia.com)**

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## Try Something New Every Week

**When was the last time you tried something new in your writing life? For example:**
**If you write only in the mornings, you could try writing in the afternoons.**

**If you write in a quiet studio, you might give writing in a crowded café a shot.**

**If you write gritty adventure novels, see what happens if you try a frothy romance.**

**If you pride yourself on clean, pared-down prose, write something chatty and florid for a change.**

**Virtually any aspect of your writing process can be exchanged for something altogether new and different.**

**Human beings are creatures of habit, and writers are no exception. In my years as a writing coach, I've found that few writers ever try something entirely new, and most show considerable resistance to doing so. "I know what I want to write," is a common response. "Why should I try something different?" Or, "I've always written late at night. I would hate trying to write first thing in the morning."**

**Habits feel good. They are safe. They are predictable. And they have a true benefit. When we do something out of habit, we don't need to pay that much attention to it. We can operate, at least partially, on automatic pilot, allowing us to occupy our brains with other things.**

**Trying new things helps you discover and verify what genuinely works.**

**Most of us think we know what works best for us. Yet, most of us come to that conclusion without a lot of experimentation. The typical way we develop a writing process is to try two or three things and settle for the one we like the best. A whole range of possibilities out there we have never tried. We have no idea whether we're actually using the process that works the best, or if we've simply hit upon one that works okay and stuck with it.**

**The process that seemed best in the past may not be the best process now. Conditions change. *We* change. Our skills, interests, and living circumstances shift over time. Just because we wrote better in a notebook than on a computer back in 2005 doesn't mean we still do. Just because our early poems sucked so badly we swore to stick to prose doesn't mean we shouldn't give poetry another go.**

**Trying new things wakes you up. Being pushed out of our comfortable everyday habits is exciting. It helps us see the world anew. New things make us pay attention.**

**That automatic-pilot mode of operation…means we're not fully present with our work. Doing something we are unfamiliar with forces us to focus our full mental energy in on the task…will deepen and sharpen our writing.**

**If you...have gotten into a safe, comfortable groove, climb out of it at least once a week. Set a goal for one new thing you're going to do with your writing this week. Even a small change can offer enormous benefits.**

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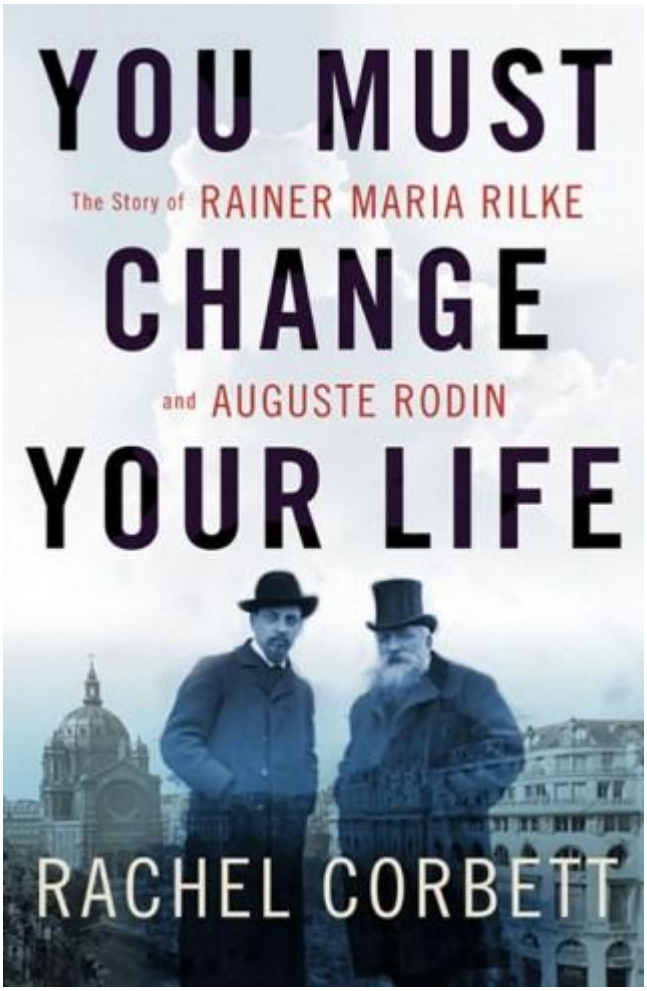
## The Invention of Empathy: Rilke, Rodin, and the Art of "Inseeing"

**How a doctor, a philosopher, a poet, and a sculptor co-created the modern concept of empathy. BY MARIA POPOVA**




**Empathy, an orientation of spirit decidedly different from sympathy, has become central to our moral universe. We celebrate it as the hallmark of a noble spirit, a pillar of social justice, and the gateway to reaching our highest human potential — a centerpiece of our very humanity. And yet this conception of empathy is a little more than a century old and originated in art: It only entered the modern lexicon in the early twentieth century, when it was used to describe the imaginative act of projecting oneself into a work of art in an effort to understand why art moves us.**

**That improbable origin and its wide ripples across the popular imagination are what Rachel Corbett explores in *You Must Change Your Life: The Story of Rainer Maria Rilke and Auguste Rodin* (*public library*) — a layered and lyrical inquiry into the personal, interpersonal, and cultural forces behind and around Rainer Maria Rilke's iconic *Letters to a Young Poet*, a book so beloved and widely quoted in the century since its publication that it has taken on the qualities of a sacred text for secular culture. Out of its origin story Corbett wrests a larger story of "how the will to create drives young artists to overcome even the most heart-hollowing of childhoods and make their work at any cost."**

**Recounting her revelatory first encounter with the Rilke classic, a gift from her mother, who had in turn received it from a mentor as a young girl, Corbett captures the singular enchantment that this miraculous book has held for generations:**

**"Reading it that evening was like having someone whisper to me, in elongated Germanic sentences, all the youthful affirmations I had been yearning to hear. *Loneliness is just space expanding around you. Trust uncertainty. Sadness is life holding you in its hands and changing you. Make solitude your home.***

**What gives the book its enduring appeal is that it crystallizes the spirit of delirious transition in which it was written. You can pick it up during any of life's upheavals, flip it open to a random page, and find a consolation that feels both universal and breathed into your ear alone.**

**What most people don't know, Corbett points out, is that as Rilke was bequeathing his poetic wisdom to the recipient of his letters, the nineteen-year-old cadet and aspiring poet Franz Xaver Kappus, he was also channelling his own great mentor — the French sculptor Rodin, for whom Rilke worked for a number of years and whom he revered for the remainder of his life. Despite their staggering surface differences — "Rodin was a rational Gallic in his sixties, while Rilke was a German romantic in his twenties," Corbett writes, likening Rodin to a mountain and Rilke to "the mist encircling it" — the sculptor became the young poet's most significant influence. But Rodin's greatest gift to Rilke was the very thing that lends *Letters to a Young Poet* its abiding spiritual allure: the art of empathy.**

**Corbett writes:**

**The invention of empathy corresponds to many of the climactic shifts in the art, philosophy and psychology of *fin-de-siècle* Europe, and it changed the way artists thought about their work and the way observers related to it for generations to come.**

**Empathy may be a concept saturating today's popular lexicon so completely as to border on meaninglessness, yet it was entirely novel and ablaze with numinous meaning in Rilke's day. Its invention is the work of two unlikely co-creators — Wilhelm Wundt, a German doctor who "accidentally forged the birth of psychology in the 1860s," and Theodor Lipps, a philosopher from the following generation. In seeking to understand why art affects us so powerfully, Lipps originated the then-radical hypothesis that the power of its impact didn't reside in the work of art itself but was, rather, synthesized by the viewer in the act of viewing. Corbett condenses the essence of his proposition and traces its combinatorial creation:**

**The moment a viewer recognizes a painting as beautiful, it transforms from an object into a work of art. The act of looking, then, becomes a creative process, and the viewer becomes the artist.**

**Lipps found a name for his theory in an 1873 dissertation by a German aesthetics student named Robert Vischer. When people project their emotions, ideas or memories onto objects they enact a process that Vischer called *einfühlung*, literally "feeling into." The British psychologist Edward Titchener translated the word into English as "empathy" in 1909, deriving it from the Greek *empatheia*, or "in pathos." For Fischer, *einfühlung* revealed why a work of art caused an observer to unconsciously "move in and with the forms." He dubbed this bodily mimesis "muscular empathy," a concept that resonated with Lipps, who once attended a dance recital and felt himself "striving and performing" with the dancers. He also linked this idea to other somatosensory imitations, like yawns and laughter.**

**Half a century later, Mark Rothko would observe: *"The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them."* He was articulating the model of creative contagion — or what Leo Tolstoy called the "emotional infectiousness" of art — that Lipps had formulated. Corbett writes:**

**Empathy explained why people sometimes describe the experience of "losing themselves" in a powerful work of art. Maybe their ears deafen to the sounds around them, the hair rises on the backs of their necks or they lose track of the passage of time. Something produces a "gut feeling" or triggers a flood of memory, like Proust's madeleine. When a work of art is effective, it draws the observer out into the world, while the observer draws the work back into his or her body. Empathy was what made red paint run like blood in the veins, or a blue sky fill the lungs with air.**

**But although empathy originated in the contemplation of art, it was psychologists who imported it into popular culture, largely thanks to the cross-pollination of art and science in early-twentieth-century Europe. Corbett writes:**

**In Vienna, the young professor Sigmund Freud wrote to a friend in 1896 that he had "immersed" himself in the teachings of Lipps, "who I suspect has the clearest mind among present-day philosophical writers." Several years later, Freud thanked Lipps for giving him "the courage and capacity" to write his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. He went on to advance Lipps's research further when he made the case that empathy should be embraced by psychoanalysts as a tool for understanding patients. He urged his students to observe their patients not from a place of judgment, but of empathy. They ought to recede into the background like a "receptive organ" and strive toward the "putting of oneself in the other person's place," he said.**

**The concept, of course, was far from novel, even if the language to contain it was — half a century earlier, across the Atlantic, Walt Whitman had articulated the very same notion in his timeless treatise on medicine and the human spirit. But Lipps devised the right language to infiltrate the popular imagination and placed himself in the right place, at the right time. When he became chair of the University of Munich's philosophy department in 1894, his students included the great Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, who would later come to echo a number of Lipps's ideas in his writings about the spiritual element in art, and Rilke, who enrolled in Lipps's foundational aesthetics course as soon as he arrived in Munich from Prague.**

**Central to Lipps's invention of empathy was his notion of *einsehen*, or "inseeing" — a kind of conscious observation which Corbett so poetically describes as "the wondrous voyage from the surface of a thing to its heart, wherein perception leads to an emotional connection." She writes:**

**If faced with a rock, for instance, one should stare deep into the place where its rockness begins to form. Then the observer should keep looking until his own center starts to sink with the stony weight of the rock forming inside him, too. It is a kind of perception that takes place within the body, and it requires the observer to be both the seer and the seen. To observe with empathy, one sees not only with the eyes but with the skin.**

**The concept struck Rilke as a particularly revelatory way of looking at not only art but life itself. He wrote in a letter to a friend:**
**Though you may laugh if I tell you where my very greatest feeling, my world-feeling, my earthly bliss was, I must confess to you: it was, again and again, here and there, in such in-seeing in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments of this godlike in-seeing.**

**Corbett captures the crux of Rilke's insight: In describing his joy at experiencing the world this way, Rilke echoed Lipps's belief that, through empathy, a person could**

**free himself from the solitude of his mind. At the same time that Rilke was studying at the zoo in Paris, Lipps was in Munich working on his theory of empathy and aesthetic enjoyment. In his seminal paper on the subject he identified the four types of empathy as he saw them: general apperceptive empathy: when one sees movement in everyday objects; empirical empathy: when one sees human qualities in the nonhuman; mood empathy: when one attributes emotional states to colors and music, like "cheerful yellow"; and sensible appearance empathy: when gestures or movements convey internal feelings.**

**Out of this dynamic dialogue between inner and outer arises the most elemental question of existence: What is the self? This invites an auxiliary question: If we ourselves can possess *a* self, how can we know that others are also in possession of selves? Corbett writes: [This] was the question to which Rilke's old professor Theodor Lipps's empathy research eventually led him. He had reasoned that if *einfühlung* explained the way people see themselves in objects, then the act of observation was not one of passive absorption, but of lived recognition. It was the self existing in another place. And if we see ourselves in art, perhaps we could also see ourselves in other people.**

**Empathy was the gateway into the minds of others. Rilke's prodigious capacity for it, then, was both his greatest poetic gift and probably his hardest-borne cross.**
**In the remainder of the spectacular *You Must Change Your Life*, Corbett goes on to disentangle the intricate mesh of influences and interdependencies that shaped Rilke's enduring legacy and its broader implications for the inner life of artists. Complement it with Rilke himself on writing and what it means to be an artist and the value of uncertainty.**

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## *A Newly Discovered Difference Between Alligators and Crocodiles* By NICHOLAS ST. FLEUR MARCH 12, 2018 New York Times

**The most obvious way to tell a crocodile, left, from an alligator, is from their snouts: Those of alligators are wider and shorter, and crocodiles' top and bottom teeth are interlaced and visible when their mouths are closed.**CreditLeft, wickedmrb; Right, Tim Donovan/Florida Fish and Wildlife Service

**How do you tell an alligator from a crocodile? And no, dad joke enthusiasts, the answer isn't that you see one later and the other after a while.**

**The most obvious way to discern the two reptiles is to stare down their sinister snouts. Alligators have U-shaped faces that are wide and short,**

**while crocodiles have slender almost V-shaped muzzles. And if you're daring enough, take a gander at their chompers. When an alligator closes its mouth, you tend to see only its upper teeth. Crocodiles on the other hand flash a toothy grin with their top and bottom teeth interlacing.**

**Many of the differences between the two center on their heads and mouths. Now, researchers from Japan have identified what they believe to be another feature that sets the reptiles apart: Alligators tend to have shorter humerus bones in their forelimbs and shorter femurs in their hind limbs than crocodiles, the team reported last week.**

**"This information could help explain differences in their ecology and locomotion, including the strange fact that, while small crocodiles have been observed to bound and gallop, alligators have not," Julia Molnar an evolutionary biologist from the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine. She said the limb differences can affect things like speed and leverage in the animals.**

**The differences are small, not something you could spot in the wild. The finding may provide insights into the ways the two reptiles move. The study published last week in the journal Royal Society Open Science.**

**Masaya Iijima, a vertebrate paleontologist from Hokkaido University in Japan and lead author on the study, measured more than 120 alligator and crocodile skeletons from nearly a dozen museums across the world. Then he analyzed the results using a statistical model. The specimens mostly belonged to extinct crocodilians, which is the supergroup that encompasses both alligators and crocodiles, as well as caimans and gharials.**


**Femurs in the hind limbs and humerus bones in the forelimbs of crocodiles are longer than in alligators, which may explain observed differences in how the two reptiles get around. CreditMasaya Iijima/Hokkaido University**

**Though they look remarkably similar, alligators and crocodiles diverged evolutionarily during the Late Cretaceous period some 80 million years ago. To put that into context, humans and chimpanzees split ways about 7 million years ago. Both reptiles also survived the mass extinction event that wiped out the dinosaurs, and since then have remained relatively unchanged. That includes the differences seen in their limb proportions, according to Dr. Iijima.**

**He found that over the course of millions of years, crocodiles tended to have longer humerus bones and femur bones than alligators. That suggests that the muscles attached to those bones extended farther on crocodiles than on alligators. The newly discovered difference is not nearly as apparent as the differences seen in the reptiles' snouts.**

**"I didn't notice it in the museum, but when I put them into the statistical test then I found it," Dr. Iijima said. "It's a very tiny difference, but an important difference."**

**Though he found a statistical difference between the two superfamilies, Dr. Iijima noted that does not necessarily mean the differences have had a noticeable effect.**

**"It is surprising that this has not been investigated before, but many aspects of crocodilian biology have been neglected," said John Hutchinson, an evolutionary biomechanist at the Royal Veterinary College at the University of London.**

**But Dr. Hutchinson added that he was not entirely convinced by the findings, suggesting that the small differences might have resulted from missing cartilage in the museum specimens. "Or, it could be a real difference that reflects something of broader importance such as movement patterns," Dr. Hutchinson said.**

**Dr. Iijima said the next steps are to study living alligators and crocodiles in order to determine whether the differences in their limbs correspond to differences in how they move.**