



## FROM SUBVERTING LANGUAGE AND FORM IN SCREENPLAYS, MONOLOGUES AND NOVELS, MAUREEN MEDVED REVEALS THE WONDERS OF WORDPLAY AND HOW IT HAS SHAPED HER STORYTELLING CAREER

Maureen Medved, Assistant Professor at UBC Vancouver's Creative Writing Program, never thought of herself as a writer. In fact, her writing career began without much writing at all. But whether through performance monologues, fiction novels, theatrical plays or movie screenplays, it is Medved's role as a storyteller that has prompted her to explore unconventional approaches to writing—approaches that allow her to push the boundaries of language in distinct and often imaginative ways.

"Some people say that my stories don't have a traditional structure but actually they do, I just like to subvert them," she says. "They're told in a way that even Aristotle, if he were around, would say she knows my work. The reason that I subvert form isn't just to be an innovator but because this is the way this character would tell the story – it's organic to the character."

This emphasis on character development inspired Medved to pick up the pen to begin her storytelling career – first as a performance artist. She began writing monologues based on characters she invented and episodes in their lives, which she performed in public spaces like art galleries and nightclubs. But her storytelling soon evolved to move from performance to page. Focusing on one of her monologue characters named Tracey Berkowitz, Medved embarked on her first foray into novel writing.

"I was very influenced by coming-of-age stories that I had read as a child about teenage boys that were going through adventures like *Catcher in the Rye*," says Medved. "I remember at that stage searching for stories told from a female perspective that were edgy and about taking huge physical and emotional risks and not being able to find them. I felt that the feelings I was having at the time were not being expressed in the books that I was reading."

**"The reason that I subvert form isn't just to be an innovator but because this is the way this character would tell the story – it's organic to the character."**

The result of this exhaustive search was Medved's own first novel entitled *The Tracey Fragments*. A blend of frantic facts and fictions, the book takes readers on a journey into the shattered psyche of a 15-year old girl who is on the verge of imploding. Although the novel wasn't autobiographical, the Tracey character became Medved's spokesperson for the frustrations of being young, female, angry and passionate.

*The Tracey Fragments* may have been written following a conventional storytelling trajectory but Medved's approach to telling Tracey's story was less than conventional. Concentrating on the natural poetry of everyday speech, Medved took what would normally be subconscious thoughts of a character and made them conscious to the reader – no matter how disjointed they may seem.

Because of her familiarity with screen and stage writing, Medved

also began envisioning how the events of the novel would play out as a movie while she was writing the novel – something she admits most writers don't even consider until well after publication. While most novels are optioned by producers who hire others to write the screenplay, Medved was resolute about writing the adaptation herself and pretended the novel didn't exist in order to bring it to life on the screen:

"Books are a very internal form. Film is a visual art – it's like a visual form of storytelling. But I envisioned the film as I was writing the novel so I knew I had to write the screenplay. I wanted to capture the essence of the book without sticking to the book so I actually wrote things into the screenplay that weren't even in the book."

Nearly 10 years since its original publication date, *The Tracey Fragments* premiered to audiences at the Berlin International Film Festival in early 2007. There, the film and its director Bruce McDonald were awarded the Manfred Salzgeber Award Prize for the most innovative feature film of the year. Like the novel, the film adaptation takes an unusual approach to visual storytelling by using multiframe, a filming technique that has been described by some as "a pop art explosion."

With *The Tracey Fragments* moving on to its North American premiere, Medved has set her sights on completing a new novel. Although reluctant to reveal too much, she describes the book as another character study about a woman in her middle years who has her own kind of crisis that she's working through.

"The person that I'm working with right now is a very quiet and introverted person who in mid-life, is finally ready to burst open," she says. "All my stories begin with characters who are in the middle of a crisis. I want to speak for a character who normally doesn't have a voice to speak – somebody who is on the fringes of society. By fringes, I mean someone whose voice isn't normally heard or others don't pay attention to that person. That's the kind of person who speaks to me."

As a published writer, Medved knows the impact that a relatable character has, particularly when she receives feedback about one of her characters that has touched something within a reader. As such, Medved steadfastly champions the vital role that storytelling plays in research: "I think stories are as important as anything else we could be learning about because it's feeding the human soul. Every single person in the world is walking around with his or her own narrative. Narrative and storytelling isn't the prerogative of a few, it's part of our DNA. It's an integral part of who we are as humans."

The film adaptation of *The Tracey Fragments* is set to make its North American debut at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2007 and stars Ellen Page (*Hard Candy*, *X-Men 3*). First published in 1998, the novel *The Tracey Fragments* will be re-released by House of Anansi Press to coincide with the film's Canadian release in the fall. Les Allusifs is publishing a French language version of the book, which should also be available in the fall. She has received funding from Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. ■