

... I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth . . . that man is not truly one, but two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. . . . I hazard the guess that man will ultimately be known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.

Moskowitz suggests "character imaging," making lists of the qualities, images, and actions that describe such incongruities in the writer's personality. Here is a sample list from a student exercise:

### Elegant

silk scarf to the knees  
still  
frowns at library noise  
startled gazelle  
Waterford crystal  
a single white rosebud  
walks alone into the woods

### Vulgar

sequins on a fringed cowhide vest  
laughing  
hands out candy  
slobbering puppy  
souvenir plate made in Mexico  
two dozen overblown red roses  
throws a costume party

At this point the contradictory lists could be transformed into two separate, named characters. Then, where might they meet? In what situation might they find themselves? How would a confrontation between these two play out?

It is, of course, impossible to know to what degree Shakespeare, Eliot, Hemingway, or Saperstein self-consciously used their own inner contradictions to build and dramatize their characters. An author works not only from his or her own personality but also from observation and imagination, and I fully believe that you are working at full stretch only when all three are involved. The question of autobiography is a complicated one, and as writer you frequently won't know yourself how much you have experienced, how much you have observed, and how much you have invented. Actress Mildred Dunnock once observed that drama is possible "because people can feel what they haven't experienced," an observation that surely extends to the writing and reading of fiction. If you push yourself to write at the outer edge of your emotional experience—what you can imagine yourself doing, even if you might not risk such actions in life—then all your writing is autobiographical in the sense that it must have passed through your mind.