



FAILURE AIN'T NO SUCCESS AT ALL

by Bill English, November 2009

Lately I've wandered away from the Dewey Decimal System; out beyond the categories employed by Barnes & Noble, to a form I'm calling the *movel*. My latest work, *The Failure*, blends the novel and memoir into an earthy confection of truth and lies. Although some kindly consider the title ironic, I do not. The writing life has left me by the side of the highway like road kill. Not even the likes of Charles Bukowski or Henry Miller ventured so far into literary dismissal. For decades people have asked me: "How come you're not famous?" Let's examine the clues. First and foremost, I don't work well with others. Literary agents and New York editors find me exasperating. After years of reading the wisdom of the Tao, I currently question whether *others* really exist at all. This comically absurd and solipsistic point of view can result in a voice that goes well beyond "First Person" into a realm a reader can find disconcerting. Enlightened fans of Walt Whitman sometimes experience an out-of-body sensation that breaks down the barrier between themselves and the page. They become One with the author of *Leaves of Grass*. Generally readers are a bit unnerved by this cosmic destruction of their point of view. Anything that threatens to devour the Self is suspect as beach reading. For years I've nurtured my own desire to maintain a certain delusion of normalcy,

but I'm now ready to give up my chosen path as a storyteller. What I've gleaned from composing well over a million words, is the revelation that I no longer wish to write in complete sentences. I would like to take this opportunity to announce that I am through with the perils of the paragraph. Henceforth, I plan to scribble a few simple phrases on canvas like a painter. Call it the desperate graffiti of someone attempting to kick the writing habit. Believe me, no drug is more seductive or addictive than self-expression. Oh, how we love to babble on--drunk on the sound of our own words, deluded that we can somehow write our way around the inconvenience of the human condition. Art is seen as the last refuge. Looking back I now realize that the true value of my writing was that it gave me something to do. I only did it, to do it. Writing has never been hard for me. I do not cringe or cower before the blank page. I think the key to great writing is a self-absorbed delight in yourself. I can still read passages in *The Failure* that I've worked on for months, and laugh out loud or shed a tear. I touch myself. I crack myself up. Most likely, my latest work will end up in the closet with many of my other forgotten manuscripts. Often I recall that final scene in *The Raider's of The Lost Ark*; the one where the Ark of the Covenant is put in a wooden crate and piled up with the rest of the unmentionable artifacts of human history. Doomed to oblivion. There's a passage in *The Failure* where I describe the fate of a single copy of one of my published novels. *The Cultivator*. When newly published in 1985, it featured a bright and optimistic green cover. For fifteen years I passively observed one particular volume as it sat on a sunny

bookshelf in a used bookstore in Santa Rosa, California. Slowly its luminous shamrock cover began to fade to a sickly aqua, the color of dried up toothpaste. No one cared enough to buy my novel. For all I know, it's still there; its spine now bleached white from neglect.

Bill English was born in San Francisco. He is an award-winning journalist who has written columns, features and book reviews for the San Francisco Chronicle, The Bark magazine, the Boise Weekly, and numerous other publications. His novels include The Cultivator and The Find. English has frequently taught at The Cabin's Idaho Writing Camps over the past seven years. He is currently seeking a publisher for his novel, The Failure. Bill lives in Boise with his wife of 34 years, Jan, a familiar face to visitors at The Cabin.