Creative Writing Advice from
Making Shapely Fiction
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Date

The Shapes of Fiction

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Snapshot

Facade-
giving the character a voice

* Tell an anecdote in the voice of a character who is *not* you. But as the character tells his story have him unknowingly undercut or discredit his explanation

Facade

- Facade focuses on creating character through their own voices.

- Readers need to hear the character for themselves.

- You don't have to be grammatically correct if your character isn't.

- You have to have your character tell anecdotes in rich detail

Juggling-
the way you go back and forth between action and thought

- Going into a character's mind gives you enormous freedom

- A paragraph of thoughts ranging over decades can occur while a shoelace is being tied.

- This technique can have serious or humorous intentions.

- Actions that are fundamentally passive, like sunbathing, don't work very well.

- When you move between action and thought, your readers are outside and inside.

Juggling-
the way you go back and forth between action and thought

* Example:

* "Streater looked down at the old skates. The blue leather cracked and lined. The laces frayed. Damn. Nothing stayed the way it should. Not Elayne, not the house, nothing. He leaned down and pulled the laces to see if they had rotted. One snapped off right at the top eyelet." (pg10)

Icebergs
What your characters don't say can be the most important

✤ Arguments are central to fiction-they create tension and reveal character

✤ Dialogue is not just quotation. It is grimaces, pauses, adjustments of blouse buttons, doodles on napkins, and crossing of legs.

✤ People communicate with their bodies, faces, and timing. Make this a full conversation

Icebergs
What your characters don't say can be the most important

- Example:"Myrtice thought if Cass showed her his gold trophy one more time she'd stuff it up his nose. 'I'd love too,' she said. 'I never did get to read the inscription.'

- Conversations are like icebergs- only the very tops are visible. Most of their weight, their mass, their meanings are under the surface. make your readers feel tension.

Last Lap
places the character in the opening lines, close to the climax

* The story begins partway up the face of a cliff and not when your character, Arnold, first got interested in mountain climbing.

* Because Arnold id already in action, the story has immediate tension.

* All kinds of ironies are possible within the *Last Lap*

Trauma-
write a story that starts with a traumatic event

- The opening lines could be the catastrophe itself or its immediate aftermath.

- Example: "'I'm sorry but I really have to ask you not to call anymore. Yvonne said, and hung up. She sounded as if she were talking to a misbehaving child in her class. Wardle couldn't make his hand unclench the receiver."

Specimen-
write a story telling one anecdote about a memorable character

- People you've met are a rich source of fiction.

- Choose an incident that is particularly revelatory.

- It should dramatize not just what the character does, but who he is- what could be going on inside him.

- You're writing fiction-actual facts are your raw material, not your boundaries

Gathering-
put the main character in a situation that draws people together

✤ Examples: a party, a competition, a meeting, etc.

✤ "She's holding a cup of red punch in one hand. She can hear the Civil War historians teasing a graduate students about her feminist research. The Europeanists are complaining are complaining about parking spaces." (pg25)

✤ Create tension by telling the story from the point of view of a character who knows the culture intimately, has been raised in it or belonged to it, but now feels alienated.

✤ Another strategy is to tell the story from the point of view of a newcomer, a stranger.

A Day in the Life-
a unit in time

❖ It could be a weekend if you were writing about a guy working at a Coney Island hot dog stand.

❖ A single day for a teacher at a ghetto school.

❖ An eight hour shift for a hospital paramedic.

❖ Work is a rich source for *A Day in the Life* material.

❖ People like to know what goes on behind the scenes.

❖ Don't load up the story with too many unusual events.

Onion-situations take place inside situations within larger situations

✤ Your characters are caught in layers of layers.

✤ The action in the center could suggest deeper problems.

✤ Examples:

✤ At a christening, two brothers who have never resolved their childhood resentments get into a heated argument about Florida versus California avocados.

✤ A conspiracy of two children to get their hands on a can of beer.

Journey-
someone is setting out from home

* It doesn't have to be a literal journey, it can start when a character enrolls in a T'ai Chi course, get bad news from a doctor, or one enchanted evening sees a face across a crowded room.

* What makes it a journey is that ordinary life is left behind.

* Your readers should not be "told" about emotions, but made to feel them the way the character does.

Visitation-
the journey comes to you

* The visit can be unpleasant or pleasant, comic or terrifying, annoying or promising.

* The story has natural tension. The character has been invaded.

* The visitor must be intriguing, but as in all stories, readers must care what happens to your character.

* The arc of the story is shaped by the visitor.

Aha!- discovery, disillusionment, revelation

✤ Revelation's might be about your character's past: A woman, watching a mechanic wipe his hands while he works on her engine, remembers something about her uncle, a brutal incident she had repressed.

✤ Latent feelings finally come together and the character comes to a realization.

Bear At The Door
write a story in which your character has a problem

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* "Henry, there's a bear at the door."

* The problem should be significant

* "Henry, it's huge."

* The problem should be pressing:

* "Henry, I think it's trying to get in."

Snapshot-focused short stories

✣ Crises

✣ Revealing incidents

✣ Epiphanies

✣ Think of the story as a series of public and private snapshots, of pictures taken at crucial moments

Blue Moon-
our deepest selves

✣ Enter the world of magic, myth, and dream

✣ Fabulous characters

✣ Unfathomable mysteries

✣ If you work on compelling characters, perceptive observations, fresh details, good prose, and shapely structures, you can create your world, and worlds beyond worlds.

Explosion-
stretch you boundaries

✤ Test the limits

✤ Push against the edges

✤ Turn the rules inside out