

CWA CONFERENCE Seminar
From non-fiction into fiction
S R Murphy, 2005

RESEARCH THE MARKET:

Series vs. single book? Who are your readers?
Assess the competition: Quantity. Quality.
Can you do better, very original, with universal appeal? A new voice?

ARE YOU PREPARED for the demands of longer books or series?

Stamina & health? Time? Solitude?
Passion for this project? Drive? Commitment? If not, don't start.
A subject & viewpoint that are strong, *original*, and that touch the heart?

TRANSITION from non-fiction to fiction:

How fiction is the same as non-fiction:
Clarity! Good organization! Vision! *Original Voice!*
Show, don't tell: The best non-fiction, too, makes pictures, *puts* reader there.

BONES OF THE BOOK: A fresh look at your old mss., or plan for a new book:

Look at story from all *different angles*:
Point of view. Voice. Setting. Start at a crucial point in the story.
Enough conflict, fear, mystery? *Fight or flight syndrome! Batter your hero!*
Does reader CARE? Do you touch his basic emotions?

GET STARTED WRITING:

Read the fiction you love. Analyze content and techniques.
Keep notebook of publishers, editors, agents for future reference.
You need blocks of unbroken time so you can *get into* the story.
Too much plotting or too little? Two viewpoints.
Plot carefully as a road map.
Discover as you go, let characters take over.
Be there: See the action. *Hear* the dialogue.
Keep it lively: *Movement* of plot, of language, of small details.
Ends of sentences: don't let them lie flat.
Setting is real: The *bones* of the earth. The sense of *place*.
Using all the senses: feel, see, touch, smell, hear, taste.
Transitions in time or place to help condense where needed.
Pacing: Mix action, setting, exposition in same paragraph. Don't drag!

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BOOKLIST:

FICTION:

Gabriel King **THE WILD ROAD** Ballantine 1997

For “cattishness”! You see and feel as if you are a cat. However, story gets pretty cruel in later chapters; I didn’t finish it, I just re-read the first parts for the wonderful writing.

Richard Adams **WATERSHIP DOWN**

Here, you are the rabbit, you see through the rabbit’s eyes and senses.

Mark Helprin **WINTER’S TALE** For *movement* in description.

Bailey White **MAMA MAKES UP HER MIND**

Wit. Brevity and tight writing. Exaggeration to create humor.

Sue Grafton *any title*

Note paragraph endings: try removing the last few words or last sentence, see how those words lift and carry what went before, saving that from a flat drop.

Also, good examples of mixing description, action, and Kinsey’s personal observations in one paragraph. Grafton never drops the reader.

Loren Eiseley (wonderful essays) **THE NIGHT COUNTRY**, and other titles

SHORT STORIES:

Peter Beagle “Lila the Werewolf”

Presents the fantastic in such a straightforward way that there is no disbelief.

Flannery O’Connor “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Good example: Short story’s ending implicit in its beginning.

BOOKS ON WRITING:

Dwight Swain **TECHNIQUES OF THE SELLING WRITER** *Univ. Of Okla.*

Simple but basic. Word absorbing. CH 4: Conflict.

Anne Lamott **BIRD BY BIRD** *Anchor*

The first chapters seem to me the most useful.

Gillian Roberts **YOU CAN WRITE A MYSTERY** *Writers Digest*

Good material for any writer. Clean, sharp.

Oakley Hall **HOW FICTION WORKS** *Writers Digest*

SOME OF MY FAVORITE QUOTES ON WRITING FICTION. Old but not out of date!

The moment the place in which the novel happens is accepted as true, through it will begin to glow, in a kind of recognizable glory, the feeling and thought that inhabited the novel in the author's head and animates the whole of his work. No blur of inexactness, no cloud of vagueness, is allowable in good writing; from the first seeing to the last putting down, there must be steady lucidity and uncompromise of purpose. Place, then, has the most delicate control over characters, too: by confining character, it defines it.

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Author's ability to invest a tale...with wisdom and truth: It is written because someone must make palpable and seen and understood his private vision of the universe. What we call literature gives the reader an intensified sense of existence, a revelation, gives him people with idiosyncrasies and habits and beliefs, people with histories and possible futures which the reader cannot help dwelling upon when the last page is turned.

Eleanor Cameron "McLuhan, Youth and Literature" Horn Book, 1972-3 issues.

The aim the writer sets himself is the same as that of the magician—to penetrate to the secret, beating heart of life; and by touching it, marvelously to transmute one set of circumstances to another. His method is the same. Instinctually he senses that words are inherently magical, and that by setting one with another he may formulate the language which is his spell.

Mollie Hunter *Talent is not Enough* Harper&Row 1976

Tension is vital to the survival of the species. It represents awareness, alertness, preparedness for action. It's readiness for fight or flight, the automatic reaction of each and every organism in the face of peril. Prod a tiger: he attacks. Prod a rabbit: he runs. Both leap from springboards of instinctive tension. Take away the ability to react to threat with tension, and a hostile world overwhelms the victim. Because tension has this survival value, mankind as a species has learned to enjoy it, in controlled amounts. So, to varying degrees, in accordance with our individual tastes and metabolisms, we involve ourselves in situations which create tension for us. We play handball. We hunt big game. We get in fights. We seduce our neighbors' wives. And we read. Especially fiction.

Dwight D. Swain *Techniques of the Selling Writers* Univ. of Okla. press 1973.

The difference between adult and children's literature is in attitude. It is in *wanting* things to matter, the underlying assumption that to the central character they *do* matter, that I see strong and successful and truly moral books for teenagers. The crisis being dealt with may be drugs or sex or divorce or crime...But in its attitude toward these subjects—in the sense that what one does about them *matters*—lies the strength and the reality of the young adult book.

Isabelle Holland Horn Book, April, 1974

It is necessary to be hopeful to write successfully for children, because children themselves are generally hopeful; but the quality of hopefulness is not something to apologize for. It is not an immature quality. Quite the contrary. If it is something we

have abandoned in our adult literature, that is one of the reasons why adult literature remains immature. Disillusionment is not a philosophy; it is a fashion—and a boring one at that.

Natalie Babbitt Horn Book, April 1974