

A STRANGE WRITING LESSON

by D-L Nelson

www.wisewordsonwriting.com

I was curled up on my Parisian friend's couch. Rain splattered the windows, making staying in the best possible alternative. I'd spent the last three hours writing, which fulfilled one childhood fantasy of writing in a garret in Paris (although this was nicer than my fantasy garret).

I watched Marina's DVD "ON THE ROAD TO PERDITION" then I listened to the bonus: the director talked about how he made his creative decisions. It was one of the best writing lessons I've had. The DVD is available on www.Amazon.com for as little \$2.99 used, but be careful of the different zones.

Rather than explain that Paul Newman was the surrogate father and loved his surrogate son Tom Hanks, at a wake, Newman sits at a piano and plays a song with one hand. Hanks joins him and plays the harmony, also, with one hand. The look they exchange and Newman's pat on the back tells everything.

In the background we see Newman's biological son's face reflecting hatred and jealousy. The camera angles down so only the son's legs show, effectively cutting him out of the relationship.

In another scene Hanks' son has seen him kill a man. Hanks and he talk about it in their Model T. They make no eye contact until the last moment of the scene. There is another separation that the director did deliberately. He shot the scene in such a way that the bar of the driver's door separates father and son. It is so subtle that no one would say, "Oh look at the bar of the driver's door emphasizing the separation between the father and son." Yet visually and psychologically it is there.

Whenever there is a death, water is involved. Sometimes it is rain, another time it is water in a bath tub. Repeated symbolism can be effective. The more subtle it is, the more effective.

To show Hanks' son as slightly alienated, the boy is bicycling in the opposite direction of people going home from work. The director uses light and dark and many other techniques to show the action of his movie.

Scene by scene he covers the little details that show what he wants us to see. As writers we need to think as carefully as that director on how to work the details to convey the message we want to our readers.

When I went back to my writing, I rewrote the chapter I thought I had finished, using the director's message. We learn from the strangest places.

SAMPLES

"If any man wish to write in a clear style, let him be first clear in his thoughts; and if any would write in a noble style, let him first possess a noble soul. " Joan Didion

“Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words or he will certainly misunderstand them.” John Ruskin

“I’ve always thought of writing as active thoughtfulness thinking taken to a physical level made manifest on paper, where the thinker is able to account for his thoughts, reflect on them, question them, revise them, and ultimately, communicate those thoughts to others.” Mary LaChappel, talking about Sarah Lawrence College in Jan/Feb 2005 Poets & Writers

EXERCISE

Watch your favorite movie. (Mine is “LION IN WINTER” www.lioninwinter.com) And watch it through. Then go through scene by scene without the sound to see what you notice in sets, color, props and any other details.

Donna-Lane Nelson hosts her own helpful website "WiseWordsOnWriting"
Take a look: www.wisewordsonwriting.com

USEFUL LINKS

[“Write Any Book in 28 Days”](#) by Nick Daws

How would you feel if in exactly 28 days time, you were holding the finished version of your own book? This course from best-selling author Nick Daws shows you how to do it in UNDER 28 days, working less than 1 HOUR a day. [Click Now](#) for a full description...

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Here's a piece of software that is a very comprehensive and useful program. There's an impressive list of features such as: 150,000 word thesaurus, spell-checker and word count. It will produce charts showing relationships between characters and a timeline of events. You can generate links within the story between characters and events. Imagine you're describing the heroine of your story and mention her child-hood home. A link between the two can be set up. You can then link to her husband and any other character. There is much more to this program than I have room for here, but you can download a free demo version to try it out yourself. Take a look. [Click here](#)



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