

# STORY CRAFT

*By* **NORMA R. YOUNGBERG**

**VOLUME III**

# STORY CRAFT

by

NORMA YOUNGBERG

A creative writing manual for all who would  
write and sell for publication.

Volume III

Copyright 1962  
by  
Norma Youngberg

Lithographed and bound by



## INTRODUCTION

to

## VOLUME III

The first part of this series of advanced studies is devoted to style and expression.

The last part deals with professional attitudes and writers' problems.

If the previous chapters have been well learned and practiced, there will be a gratifying number of selling writers in the group who complete the work in Book III.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1 Introduction to Style	1
2 Pictorial Writing	5
3 Pictorial Writing About People	9
4 Pictorial Writing of Scenes	13
5 Pictorial Writing About Animals	16
6 Pictorial Writing - Dramatic Action	19
7 Pictorial Writing About Background and Objects	22
8 Pictorial Writing About Emotion	25
9 It's Your Story - Part I	29
10 It's Your Story - Part II	32
11 So You Got it Back	35
12 A Handful of Stars	38
13 Moral or Immoral?	42
14 You, the Conjuror	46
15 Can You Draw a Sheep?	50
16 The Cult of Obscurity	53
17 How Writers Write	56
18 Aesthetic Distance and the Fiction Scene	59
19 Watch That Villain	63
20 Say It Again	67
21 The Writer and His Notebooks	71
22 Do I Need an Agent?	75
23 The Writer and His Reading	79
24 Rights and Copyrights	86
25 Libel and Invasion of Privacy	91
26 Good and Bad Taste in Writing	95
27 Professional Attitudes - Yourself	98
28 The Writer and His Office	102
29 Professional Attitudes - Other Writers	107
30 Professional Attitudes - Toward Editors and Publishers	116
31 What to Do with Success	119
32 Trumpet in Your Hand	123

# STORY CRAFT

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO STYLE

We hear a great deal about style. "He has a smooth style," or, "I like his style," or, "Her style is awkward."

What do editors and writers mean when they talk about style? Is it like styles in clothes that can be put on, or taken off, or changed at will?

Style has been defined in many ways, but when you condense all that has been said, it amounts to this:

Style is your manner of expression.

A good style is clear and efficient expression. Poor style is faulty, pedantic, or stiff. It may also be verbose, hackneyed, pompous, over-decorated. A hundred things may be wrong with it. It all adds up to inefficient expression of the thought you wish to communicate.

A good style conveys your meaning to the reader without his having to think about how you said it. The thought comes clear to his mind instead of your words or sentences. Your words don't get in the way of his understanding. A good style is unobtrusive, yet so efficient that a reader is able to ride through the scenes of your story as in a car which carries him so smoothly from place to place, from action to action, that he is never conscious of the vehicle, but only of the view he has from the front seat.

Good style is natural style. It springs from what you are, who you are, and where you are. It comes out of your depths and is not something

used for decoration in a superficial way. It is not the frosting on the cake, but the fragrance of the freshly baked angelfood when you take it from the oven.

A writer should have something significant to say, coupled with a strong wish to say it to someone. Then it naturally follows that he needs to think out what he intends to say and how he means to word it. He needs to project himself ahead into the sentences that carry his thought to the reader.

We think in words. The more words we know, the greater our range of thought and the more complex our reasoning process, yet when we speak to others in conversation, most of us use simple words. It is these words that are always moving around in our heads during our thinking process that come natural to us in both verbal and written expression. Don't use words in writing unless you have first used them in thinking and spontaneous conversation. Words you lift from thesauruses and rhyming dictionaries contribute nothing to a fluent and natural style unless they are already familiar to you.

If you want to add new words to your writing, add them first to your thinking. Take them into your mind, make them at home there until they are no longer strangers but familiar friends. Then they will not "feel" out of place in your writing.

Simple and homely words are best for a clear and pleasing style because our readers think in these words. The word bread conjures up thousands of pleasurable experiences in the reader's mind. He knows what it means with his tongue, with his nose, eyes, and fingers. When you speak of bread, all your reader's senses leap forward to assist your communication with him. If you call it sustenance, will you get such a response? No. Your reader does not think of bread as sustenance. It is the writer's proper aim to evoke deep emotional response on the part of his readers. He can do this only by using words that are embedded in their emotions, words that involve their five senses.

This kind of writing requires thinking - thinking before we sit down to the typewriter. Fuzzy expression comes from fuzzy thinking. It may be helpful to consider that a simple sentence deals with one single thought.

Joe carried the milk buckets to the barn.

If the writer has decided that he wants the sentence to say just that, we can understand it without difficulty. But perhaps he wants to say more - embellish the thought or add more to it.

Joe pulled his old hat over his eyes, for the sleet  
beat hard upon him, yet he clutched the two milk  
buckets in his right hand and, like a soldier under

attack, he pushed through the storm  
to the barn.

Look at the sentence now. It says exactly what it did in the first place.  
It still says

Joe carried the milk buckets to the barn.

If the writer has thought the sentence through to the end and expressed it clearly to himself in a unified thought, then he is not going to lose the meaning of the sentence in some such fashion as this:

Sleeting on the barn, Joe started with the milk  
buckets, which was about three hundred yards from  
the house like a soldier pushing into the storm.

Straight writing comes from straight thinking. Where else could it possibly come from? We must train ourselves to think straight, to put main thoughts into principal clauses and minor thoughts into dependent clauses. The relationship of thoughts in a complex sentence must stand clear in the writer's mind before he sets them down on paper.

When a writer is experienced enough, he will do all this thinking ahead automatically, almost subconsciously, but he will do it and do it well. He will alternate long sentences and short ones in such a way that balance and smoothness emerge. This is style.

Good taste in word selection is the kernel of style. Here again it is essential to know which words belong together. When one has learned which words are neighbors and friends, he has learned how to communicate.

Some teachers tell us to write and not worry about style. This is without doubt good advice for the beginner, but for the writer standing on the threshold of a professional career, it is not the best advice. There is much that we can do to perfect our style.

1. By straight thinking about what we want to say.
2. By setting it down in its simplest form.
3. By building it up with added color, emotion, and action, but never losing the basic meaning.
4. By practicing the writing of short, terse sentences until we can do it with ease. Also, by practicing long and complex sentences until we can make them clear and pleasant to read.



5. By choosing specific rather than general words, by choosing picture-making, emotion-evoking words that stimulate all five senses of our reader and are tied in with his lifelong emotional experiences.
6. By writing simply and leaving the thousand-legged words to the scientists and technicians.
7. By balancing our sentences and clauses so that principal thoughts are emphasized, and minor, related thoughts are in subordinate position. The end of a sentence is the spot for emphasis.
8. By reading. You can learn much by reading and analyzing other writers' work.
9. By copying excerpts from other writers - passages that reach your emotions and which you would be proud to have written.
10. By imitating. It is good to imitate so long as you do it for practice. Try to write a half page of dialogue like Hemingway. Try to write a paragraph as Willa Cather would have written it. Keep this up long enough and you will find your own style emerging - your own unique way of saying things, and it will be as unlike any other writer's style as water is unlike the cup that holds it.

Style is not something put on from without. It emanates from within like a man's personality. It is a blend of many ingredients so elusive that it affects the reader as an almost imperceptible fragrance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PICTORIAL WRITING

In the competitive writing market today, perhaps the most sought-after skill is that special touch which enables an author to present familiar things in such a way that a vivid picture is formed in his reader's mind.

When a reader exclaims, "I can just see that house," or, "I know a woman just like that," or, "I can taste those doughnuts," then you know that the picture has been convincing.

It is not the bizarre, the unique, or the unusual that reaches the heart, but the portrayal of homely scenes, the description of things we see and use every day - the familiar and the intimate. Yet the presentation must be so skillful that the reader admits to himself that this is the simple truth and that he, himself, knew it all the time.

Pictorial writing is a wide field. It has to do with style, and for the next few chapters we shall consider various aspects of this fascinating approach to professional writing.

As indicated in the title, this type of writing appeals more to the mind's eye than to its deductive powers. This is in conformity with present trends in education. Audio-visual instruction is gaining favor on all fronts. We must bring more seeing into our writing if we intend to keep pace with the public's changing taste.

Remember that the use of strong verbs and nouns plays a most important part in producing pictorial description. Only the uninstructed depend on adverbs and adjectives to achieve their purpose.

Remember, also, that the reading public is eager for writing that has individual style. All of us enjoy seeing common, familiar scenes and situations treated in fresh and surprising ways. Although there is always danger of the amateur going to extremes with this and producing something ludicrous, it is much better to do that a few times than to stay in the old rut, worn deep with years of usage.

To illustrate: How many times have we read, "Her hair was like silk," or, "Her eyes were like forget-me-nots," or, "She walked like a queen." These similes and hundreds of others are hackneyed. One successful writer dared anyone to find in his numerous writings one simile that had ever been used before. It was a matter of pride with him to invent apt and original similes. Of course his writing is in high demand and at top prices. How many times in looking over our dramatic scenes or in hearing them read aloud we find our characters having "heart trouble." The heart "pounds," "hammers," "leaps," into the heroine's throat, or sinks "like a stone." It "throbs," "flutters," "turns over," "thrills," and "stops."

To be realistic, this use of the "heart" to express emotion is a little outdated. When a man is scared, it might be more effective to say, "He wiped his cold, sweaty hands on his jeans," or, "He tried to pull that squawky tone down to a Middle C."

There are many new and effective ways of saying that your hero is excited or frightened or angry. Look in the current magazines and see for yourself.

In order for a writer to paint word pictures for his reading audience, he must himself be able to see them. This almost always requires self-discipline in observing and recording with faithful and patient accuracy what happens around us. The writer may practice this at any time. The housewife in her home, the businessman going about his affairs, may both train themselves to think in pictorial ways. No matter where we are, there are people and objects. There is beauty, form, color, odor and movement. Even at night there is scent and there is sound. The darkness begets its own simile and metaphor. When you have hit on a good simile, write it down in your notebook or on one of those little cards you always carry.

Since examples are useful in understanding this particular skill in writing, here are a few - before and after.

Pedestrian writing:

The man was a redhead with an unusually thick nose.

(By pedestrian writing, we mean prose that pokes along - doesn't flash or run, not too interesting.)

Pictorial writing:

He had carrot hair and a nose that'd been retreaded a couple of times too often.

Pedestrian writing:

She was Mexican, but extraordinarily fair. Her eyes were like dark pools and her graceful figure was ravishingly beautiful; but I knew from her extravagant make-up that she was certainly a tramp.

Pictorial Writing:

Mexican. Maybe nineteen, a cream-color body, supple as a new rawhide lariat and wet black eyes, oversize. She was a million dollars worth of loving, but the dress and lipstick tagged it for a basement bargain.

Pedestrian writing:

The door in the back opened and a man waddled slowly in - a fat man in a magenta shirt partly open so you could see that the wiry red hair on his chest was exactly like that on his head.

Pictorial writing:

The door at the back opened and somebody waddled in. He looked like a lard snowman bulging out of a magenta sport shirt. There was a head and chest-ful of rusty wads of steel wool that might have been hair.

(Adapted from Robinson MacLean)

As with other skills, it takes practice to perfect the craft of pictorial writing. The only way to learn is by doing. Even one paragraph written over and over until it presents a clear picture in an interesting way will take you a long step along the road to mastery of this delightful picture writing.

Another method of perfecting this art is to study what others have done. Fatten your notebook with specimens of pictorial writing. Glean them from your current reading, from the masters of the past, and by exchange with other writers of your acquaintance. The act of copying such examples is helpful, because it feeds something into the subconscious mind that will come out later as your own brand of pictorial writing.

This is not easy, but it will pay off in many ways. It will increase your own satisfaction and self-respect. It will give you added pleasure in your own work and in the writings of others, and it will make your work more acceptable to editors.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PICTORIAL WRITING ABOUT PEOPLE

Pictorial writing about characters is tied in with the important business of making your characters come to life. Not a small part of this most necessary work is in providing a clear picture for your reader. If they can see your man, hear him, touch him, smell him, you already have a good start on making them know your hero as a living person. But that is not enough. You must go deeper than that. You must be able to show what is inside the man. And you must show what effect he has on other people or even on the animals around him.

In order to know fully this story-person, it will probably be necessary to dig into his background. What forces worked upon him through the years to make him what he is today? It is true that most persons of mature years have the story of their lives written on their faces. How often we have turned away from a face, embarrassed because so much of the naked soul was revealed. This is one of the skills a writer must cultivate - to see behind the face into the personality and the soul of the subject - history in a face.

Pictorial writing about people can be a complex undertaking. No characterization is complete unless it includes the effect our character has on the persons associated with him - the relation between the lady and her maid, or that between the rubber-plantation manager and his coolies. It goes deeper than that. It shows how our character behaves in the company of his peers and how he reacts when the big boss stops at his desk.

The varying manner of his behavior on these different levels of association reveal much about his character. Is he compassionate?

Is he fawning? Is he overbearing? Is he an opportunist? Is he frank and honest? Is he devious and evasive? Does he show a chameleon-like tendency to change color according to the company he keeps? In the hands of a skillful writer, the association of our hero with others is a powerful light shed on his character.

Looking at it from another angle, it is also important that the successful writer know which features of the face and what aspects of the person's physical behavior are most expressive and revealing of our hero's personality. Careful study of characterizations in published works, both of masters of the past and contemporary writers, will teach us a great deal about what characteristics should be emphasized. Are the eyes or lips more indicative of emotion? Is movement of the hand or the head more expressive? What peculiar gestures are special to this individual, and how do they expose his temperament?

In stories by beginners we find a great deal of eye movement. "His eyes crawled over me," "His eyes searched the dark horizon," "His eyes held mine," and so on. Also, we find a lot of cigarette lighting and laying on of the hands. "He waved his hand toward the stack of books," "He motioned with his hand," "He clenched his hands."

All these expressions may be properly used at one time or another, but the skillful writer will find new and subtle ways of revealing his character without using the hackneyed devices of the past.

There is also a great difference between subjective treatment of a character and objective description. In a thorough delineation, both objective and subjective treatment will be necessary. Someone has estimated that it takes about ten thousand words to fully develop one character. This, in most books, would include much of both objective and subjective treatment.

Here again we must realize the advantage subjective treatment gives to the author. If he is inside a character, thinking, feeling, suffering and triumphing with him, he can make use of all the subjective emotions, together with some stream-of-consciousness revelation of his deepest thoughts. If, by skillful manipulation of viewpoint, the character is also viewed objectively by some other character, we have a dimensional picture of the person. He comes to life.

In reading characterizations in stories, it is a helpful thing to classify them according to subjective or objective treatment, and note what technique the author used.

#### TO CLASSIFY:

1. See your character and make your reader see him. It is usually best to see him in color and in action. The caricature was popular in Dickens' time, but modern

writers are, for the most part, more realistic. Although some distortion is allowable, it should never approach the grotesque.

2. Listen to your character. How does he talk? Has he any speech peculiarities? Has he any favorite sayings or expressions? Is he educated or ignorant, sophisticated or naive? Your readers must hear this character talk. Dialogue is important in characterization. It reveals what the character thinks and how he thinks. It reveals his past experience and present attitudes. In objective description dialogue is indispensable in setting forth the character's private views and aspirations.
3. Feel of him. Is his hair wiry or soft? Run your hand through it and find out. Is he bald? Does he have a dry skin, or are his hands always moist? Is he muscular and firm-fleshed, or is that paunch soft and flabby? Is there a vital feel about the man, or is he lethargic, already partly moribund? Lay your hand on him and find out.
4. Smell him. Does he use soap and smell like it, or does a fishy odor cling to him, or perhaps the fragrance of new-mown hay, or the pine smell of fresh cut lumber, or maybe honest farmer sweat? We smell every living person we associate with, and often we hardly realize it, but the author must remember that this is an important factor in making the story character live.
5. Know his history. While it may not be necessary to reveal all of your character's past, it is important for you to know it, in order that you may rightly interpret his actions and reactions during the period of your specific story. You must know what forces shaped him during the formative years. Twists in mature characters are almost always traceable to some tragedy or mishandling during the first seven years of life. Great storms leave marks upon the soul even as they do on a growing tree. These need to be taken into account and may be picked up in flashback or delicately hinted at in dialogue. The writer must have knowledge of them all in order to produce the living man before his readers.
6. How does your character regard himself? This is important to any portrayal of human nature. Is your hero a retiring, self-effacing person with a humble or almost servile opinion of himself? Is he bombastic and full of self-conceit? Or perhaps he has just a



normal self-respect, but it is important for the writer to know and to show the reader how the hero regards himself.

7. Know what effect he has on other people. Do his friends trust him? How do children respond to him? What is one's reaction on shaking hands with him for the first time? What quality of the man impresses itself on those who associate with him?

Of course, not all of these methods of delineation can be used in a short story. In a novel, they will certainly all be used in order to fully develop the character.