

# Darren's Fictive Dream

## The Fictive Dream – Wrekin Writers Workshop June 2011

People read fiction for pleasure – that's it – nothing else. So if our writing gives pleasure then we've succeeded haven't we? No. Good writing does more: it transports the reader into the created world. We readers can feel as if we are actually in the story, experiencing the same amazing settings, facing the same life changing problems, our actual existence fades into the background, and people sometimes have to nudge us back into the real world. As writers I hope that we have all experienced this dream-like state while reading, if not you're missing out big time, get down to the library, you've been reading the wrong books. What follows are the essential elements to producing writing that should transport your readers into the fictive dream.

### The Hook

This is a well-known device. Leave a question unanswered so the reader is enticed to read further. What you may not know is that ideally this needs to happen within the first or second sentence. Here's an excellent example:

"The young man was trapped at the top end of the Shokoe Slip where a crowd had gathered in Cary Street. The young man had smelt the trouble in the air and had tried to avoid it by ducking into an alleyway behind Kerr's Tobacco Warehouse, but a chained guard dog had lunged at him and so driven him back to the steep cobbled slip where the crowd had engulfed him."

That was the first two sentences of the brilliant novel "Rebel" by Bernard Cornwell. It leaves you wondering: who is this young man? Why have the crowd engulfed him? What is going to happen next?

### The Conman's Art

A good writer creates the fictive dream through the power of suggestion. Like a conman, your story needs to include little proofs to persuade the reader it is real. These proofs come in the form of closely observed vivid

physical details. Importantly the story should show sensuous detail and build a word picture of the setting. Not the “The garden was beautiful” this is telling, show the details that make it beautiful and describe the relevant effects of this beauty on your character. Not by trying to describe the whole garden but focusing on the electric blue petals of a wild plant and the uneven tinkling of the water fountain brushed by the wind.

### **Make Them Suffer**

If something bad happens to a character the reader will feel sympathy for them. This emotional involvement is an important element for creating the fictive dream. Situations of humiliation, embarrassment, loneliness, repression, anticipation of something nasty to come, injustice, lovelessness, danger, being deprived of something, in fact anything that brings suffering in some form will create sympathy. The writer must capitalise on this sympathy by showing the discomfort to the reader and allowing them to empathise with what the character is feeling.

### **The Gallant Goal**

The reader needs to identify with the character and this is achieved by giving your character a desire to achieve something that the reader will respect. For example in the “Da Vinci Code” the reader completely supports professor Langdon’s goal to prove his innocence. Identification with the character’s ‘admirable ambition’ will help to suck the reader into the fictive dream, and this trick can be used even with seemingly despicable characters, you just need to find their ‘gallant goal’.

### **Inner Conflict**

Now the reader needs to take part in the character’s indecision between two important moral choices. One choice is driven by reason; the other is driven by passion. Making the wrong choice will lead to total ruin. For maximum effect the reader needs to feel the character’s agony as he imagines the possible consequences.

### **What’s the Point?**

The most important element in creating any story is to ensure that the story has a reason. We need to know what the story is about. To be fair

this may not affect the fictive dream, but it will become evident to an experienced reader that your story mechanism is missing some vital cog unless you start to reveal the reason for the story at the start of the story. What reason am I talking about? Well, have you ever got to the end of a story, felt disappointed and thought “So what was that story actually about?” Good stories focus on one aspect of human life and expose what happens when it is tested – that’s the reason for our stories – that’s what we’re writing about. Ideally the character needs to have a revelation and change in some way as a result of the test. Some writers create the story reason by instinct, but most need help. When writing a story if we can keep in mind the specific test that the story is revealing we can make sure that we shape the tale with complete relevance. In this way we can tell a complete story without floundering onto some meaningless rocks. Here’s a simple example: if our story test is “pursuit of wealth, without consideration for others, leads to unhappiness” we can design every scene to travel logically towards our conclusion – in this case misery. I have an amazing idea for an original character to fit this test I’ll call him Scrooge. Anyway, by using the ‘story reason’ we can protect our writing from the dreaded proclamation “I couldn’t get into the story; I wasn’t sure where it was going.”

### **The Challenge**

Write up to 300 words as the opening of a short story. Your piece will hopefully create ‘The Fictive Dream’ by fulfilling the following requirements:

1. There should be a hook in the first or second sentence.
2. The writing should show sensuous details and create a word picture of the setting.
3. Something bad should happen to the main character.
4. The suffering should be shown and detailed.
5. The main character’s ‘gallant goal’ should be revealed.
6. The character should start to explore the consequences of an important decision
7. The reason for the story should start to reveal itself.

If you need a push in the right direction then I have created some examples of suffering and some gallant goals, you can pick one at random, which may help to inspire you. Enjoy.

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