

Week Eleven: The climax

Reading: *The Gift of the Magi*, by O. Henry (link: https://www.auburn.edu/~vestmon/Gift_of_the_Magi.html).

Dissect the story, going through Normal World/Unbalance/Quest/Crisis/New Balance.

Flannery O'Connor's Moment of Grace

"There is a moment of grace in most of the stories, or a moment where it is offered, and is usually rejected."

"All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful."

"There is something in us, as storytellers and as listeners to stories, that demands the redemptive act, that demands that what falls at least be offered the chance to be restored. The reader of today looks for this motion, and rightly so, but what he has forgotten is the cost of it. His sense of evil is diluted or lacking altogether, and so he has forgotten the price of restoration."

The Climax

We have now reached the heart of your story: the climax. You have grounded your reader in the place and time, established your main characters, jump-started the action of the story, created a pattern—now it's time to *break* that pattern and write the "punchline" of your story.

To use the example of *The Three Little Pigs*, the climax occurs when the wolf comes to blow down the third pig's house—the one made of bricks—and can't do it. Instead he climbs down the chimney and the pigs have wolf stew for dinner. Something unexpected happens: the predator becomes the prey.

That's what you want for your climax: action that takes the story in a new direction, so that your reader will be surprised, while still believing this outcome was entirely possible.

In every story, there are *two* stories going on: the physical (external) and the emotional (internal). When the climax occurs, it should be the turning point of your conflict, especially for the *external* plot—but sometimes for the *internal* as well. Ask yourself...

- What do your characters want?
- Do they get what they want?
- Do they *not* get what they want?
- Does what they want *change*?
- What does your character *feel*?

The answer to these questions will be determined by the climax.

In-class exercise: Play the five-sentence story game: (Balance, Unbalance, Quest, Crisis, New Balance). But with this addition: after the balance, decide (a) what your hero wants and (b) what your hero needs. Keep these in mind as you work towards the climax. After the New Balance is reached, discuss the five sentences in light of the questions above.

Homework

Write the next two pages of your story: the climax.