

Art Crummer's Aug. 7 Presentation

Thanks WAG, GP&W, POD groups, Monday Writers' Roundtable, and numerous colleagues who have helped me learn about STORY. Art Crummer, 2016, Aug 07, ArtCrummer@Bellsouth.net

My talk comes in three parts: I Story & Structure, II Character, III. The package

I Story and Structure

WHAT'S MOST ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN "STORY"?

Answer: _____ Basically: Something "happens"!

Three questions about any song or story:
(writer must know own answers at some point)

- 1) What happens?
- 2) Who does it? (or To whom)
- 3) What does it mean?

These are called:

PLOT
CHARACTER
THEME

As writer, you "compose" and "orchestrate" these elements.

First line, first sentence: *Should accomplish WHAT?*

- Raise a question
- Set Mood
- Introduce Char (desire/ Obstacle)
- Set up Theme/ moral/ Creative Intent

The goal.

* *INTEREST* THE READER

* *INVOLVE* THE READER

* *COMMAND* ATTENTION

EXAMPLES OF FIRST LINES, **STORY**:

- Call me Ishmael. —Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)
- It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. —Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)
- It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. —George Orwell, *1984* (1949)
- It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. —Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

EXAMPLES OF FIRST LINES, **SONGS**:

- And now the purple dusk of twilight time / steals across the meadows of my heart/High up in the sky the little stars climb/Always reminding me that we're apart You wander down the lane and far away, Leaving me a song that will not die/ Love is now the stardust of yesterday The music of the years gone by ... some times I wonder... **Hoagy Carmichael** *Stardust*
- They came to the prairie looking for gold, demanding what did not exist. /When Chief Vitachoocho explained there was none, DeSoto ut irons on his wrists **Don Grooms** *Vitachoocho*
- Wagons came from all around that little mountain town/ with gunny sacks of food and clothes, and left them on the ground. **Art Crummer** *The Fire*

- She's lost a lot of herself, that time cannot replace, bits and pieces of herself gone without a trace. She's been a-holding on to anything that happens to be there, she's all used up and forgotten and scattered everywhere. **Hazel Dickens** *It's hard to tell the singer from the song*
- On a lone barren Isle where the wild roaring billows assail the stern rock as the loud tempest raves, our hero lies still, where the dewed drooping willows, like palled weeping mourners lean over his grave. *Napoleon's Grave* also called *The Last Battle*
- Riding on the City of New Orleans, Illinois Central Monday morning rail, Fifteen cars and fifteen restless riders, Three conductors and twenty-five sacks of mail. **Steve Goodman** *City of New Orleans*
- There's a long line of mourner's coming down our little street. Their fancy cars are such a sight to see. **Bobby George and Vern Stovall** *Long Black Limousine*
- Just a few old memories/slipped down through the door/that I thought I had closed/so tightly before ...**Hazel Dickens** *Just a few old memories*

Story-telling "rules" and patterns

No rules are absolute

eg. start with the most dramatic scene

but *Patterns or Story Arcs have proved EFFECTIVE:*

- 1) Intro a Character reader will care about
- 2) Char wants something
(best: a strong DESIRE, YEARNING)
- 3) Char encounters obstacles
- 4) Char succeeds or not
- 5) Char is changed by the experience (or not)

Three Act Structure

- 1) Char in conflict; hook, stakes, setting
- 2) Plot beats & Char reaction
- 3) Resolution, & theme reiteration

"Hero story arcs"

In LITERATURE, loose guides

<p>I Hero goes on adventure (internal or external)</p> <p>II Has crisis/ conflict</p> <p>III Returns changed (or home has changed etc)</p>	<p>Alternate terms:</p> <p>Departure</p> <p>Initiation</p> <p>Return</p>
---	--

Stricter Form

Who is hero?
What's hero want?
A door opens
Hero acts
Monkey wrench
Things collapse
Hero hits bottom.
Hero risks all
Hero gets object of desire, or not

Hero Motivation/Needs: OUTER

Buy nice home
Defeat opponent
Get boss off back

INNER

Gain approval
Prove self adequate
Take charge of own destiny

In SONG, chord structures loose guides, tried and true:

Some **chord patterns** are tried and true
(I IV V... I III VI II V I I III IV V)

Variations add spice
(Dim, Aug, Sus-4)

But you get only three minutes or so for your story.

II POV Characters

Presenting characters your reader/listener will *care about*

- You CREATE: * Setting (bar, small town, kitchen, rocket ship, dungeon, ANYwhere...)
 * Mood, or (pace, rhythm, time sig., color chords)
 * Tension: (Desire vs obstacle)

Consider your expected audience

Use any place, mood, & tension (conflict) in a ways expected audience will identify with

Give your characters Strengths, Desire, weakness. (opinions & possibly unique world view)

Setting
Mood
Tension

- A young cowboy named Billy Joe grew restless on the farm, a boy filled with wanderlust, who really meant no harm **Johnny Cash** *Don't Take Your Guns To Town*
- I remember the year that Clayton Delaney Died/ they said for the last two weeks that he suffered and cried./ It made a big impression on me, tho I was just a barefoot kid./ They said he got religion in the end and I'm glad that he did. **Tom T. Hall** *Clayton Delaney*
- The worn out linoleum has lost its pattern on the kitchen floor. And the woman that used to scrub-it's turned around and walked right out the door. The oil cloth on the table she wiped so many times it's almost gone/And the elbows leaning on it hold the head of a man that drank alone. **Hazel Dickens** *Lost Patterns*
- I'm just a typical American boy from a typical American town/ I believe in God and Senator Dodd and a-keepin' old Castro down/When it came my time to serve/ I knew "better dead than red" But when I got to my old draft board, Buddy, this is what I said: Sarge, I'm only eighteen, I got a ruptured spleen /And I always carry a purse etc. **Phil Ochs** *Draft Dodger Rag*

Drama: Desire Meets Opposition. (External or Internal):

Your character desires something. There are Obstacles.

Q: Want reader to care more? A: Make stakes high, very high STAKES

Examples of more first lines:

- 1) It's midnight in a liquor store in Texas, and beneath the neon, close-up's just begun, when a boy walks in the door and points a pistol; he can't find a job but, oh, he found a gun. He pulls it off no trace of confrontation. He lets the old man run out in the street. He knows that soon they'll come with guns a-blazin', and already he can feel that great relief. **Adam Mitchell**, *Out Among the Stars*
- 2) Once I built a railroad, I made it run, I made it race against time, Once I built a railroad but now it's done, Brother can you spare a dime? **Yip Harburg** *Brother can you spare a dime*
- 3) He said I'll love you till I die. She told him you'll forget in time . **Bobby Braddock and Curly Putnam** *He Stopped Loving Her Today*

- 4) She nagged me so bad I nearly lost my mind, so I went fishin and I left behind. The ole a ladie ol de ole ladie o de ole ladie ... She begged and she pleaded cause she wanted to come, but I kinda needed a vacation from/the ole a ladie ol de ole ladie o de ole ladie.

Pat Donahue *The Old Lady*

Emotions Song vs Literature

Written work: Whole books are written about rendering emotions

(No time for this today; but this is all about taste, style, and reader expectations)

HOWEVER In some genres, lyrical passages, even purple prose are allowed, expected, desired. In literary works, reader wants to fill in without author dictating.

“Show Don’t tell”, “Resist the Urge to Explain” (SDT, RUE)

- For more **emotion and drama**:

ASK: What is your character good at, comfortable with?

Then: throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?

What about cliché and common phrases?

in most **writing** cliché and predictable simile are frowned upon; In songs, seems to work great
These are candidates for a great song BUT AVOID FOR YOUR STATEMENT OF STORY THEME

Examples? List some clichés

Shot heard round the ---, Face launched a thousand ---, An apple a day ..., A stitch in time..., God helps those who ... Avoid her like the plague, it could be worse, Face that launched a thousand ..., A stitch in time..., God helps those who ..., A PICTURE IS WORTH A... ..etc

Clichés are candidates for a great song, (but avoid for your statement of story theme)

Song, emotion in:

“telling” and use of abstraction are usually accepted/forgiven song, cliché is common/welcomed
We’ve seen many examples, already More? ...

When a woman gets the blues she hangs her little head and cries (3x)
But when a man gets the blues, he grabs him a train and rides. **Jimmie Rogers**

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill, he sounds too blue to fly...
I’m so lonesome I could cry **Hank Williams**

I tried so hard my dear to show that you’re my every dream, but you’re afraid each thing
I do is just some evil scheme ... *Cold, Cold, Heart* **Hank Williams**

Musically it’s good to write a little instrumental riff that stands out and defines the song, though not in the melody: *Folsom River Blues, Stairway to Heaven, Hotel California, Ring of Fire, Mr. Sandman, etc*

Poetry Alert:

Poets: You can get your work heard easier as song: snap fingers, stress down beats, use of fermata, other musical elements. In fact, why not turn your poem into a song? Not musical? Get someone to work with you

That’s it for PART II POV Characters

III Embodiment: Assembling Your Masterpiece

Big Picture: Assembling the Creative Piece

Scenes, POV, Distance (physical and emotional) Think Cinematically

Art gave a two-page handout. He also discussed these ideas in a blog—see WritersAlliance.org

Use of setting, cadence, tempo, mood, (and in song: time signature)

Respect how Language works; effects on brain processing. Edit, Edit, wait, edit again.

Find the rhythm of the sounds, **Walk it**, reading your work aloud -fix awkward, stumbling spots

Place important words on the downbeat

Chord and tempo selection establish MOOD

- 1) Swept Away, Swept Away/Like driftwood on a current I'm Swept Away. Someone throw me a Lifeline, pull me to the shore, (for) I am being Swept Away, **James Hawkins, Swept Away**
- 2) Intro: Evening breezes sighing, moon is in the sky/ little man, it's time for bed./Daddy's little hero is tired and wants to cry/Now come along and rest your weary head. **Maurice Signer, Al Hofman, Mayble Wayne (1934) Little Man You've had a Busy Day**
- 3) A ship out on the ocean, just a speck against the sky, Amelia Earhart flying that sad day. With her partner captain Noonan on the 2nd of July, her plane fell in the ocean far away... **Dave McEnery Amelia Earhart's Last Flight First song ever performed on commercial TV(1939)**
- 4) "There's a wild hog in Gulf Hammock I don't wish on any man. My blood knows his hurtful tusks dark the brown and yellow sand. **Will McLean Wild Hog** (He performed this at Carnegie hall)

Song Scaffolding: Building off an existing piece: *Stealing as Tradition*

Woody Guthrie songs: Almost all.

Willie Nelson's *Crazy* scaffold-ed off his hero **Hoagy Carmichael's** (1930) *Georgia on my Mind*

Art Crummer's *Crazy For Writing My Memoir* scaffold-ed off **Willie Nelson's** *Crazy* in a novelty song for a WAG writer's retreat (which included a lot of memoir writers)

I'm crazy, crazy for writing my memoir, crazy for telling so much about you. I knew you'd get all upset and might kill me, or worse, some day, you'd write your own memoir too.

Pat Donahue's *Mr. Soundman* was scaffolded off **Pat Ballard's** *Mr. Sandman* to write

Mr. Soundman, Turn up the sound /So they can hear me for miles around

Use all the volume that you can manage, / I wanna do a little hearing damage.

Mr. Soundman, you know what I need /Keep on a-crankin' till their eardrums bleed.

I'm gonna terrorize this crowd, / Mr. Soundman turn me up loud.

CLASSIC EXAMPLE:

I Didn't Know God Made Honky Tonk Angels was patterned after *Wild Side of Life* (both 1952) which in turn was scaffolded off *The prisoner's Song* (1924, Vernon Dalhart) and *Great Speckled Bird* (1925) Reverend Guy Smith (an allegory referencing Christian self-perception during the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.) "*I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes* (1925 Carter Family) and "*Thrills That I Can't Forget*(1925)

All have
same tune

Adding a thematic LICK to a song

eg Mr Sandman, I Walk the Line, Sweet Ga Brown, Ring Of Fire, Folsom Prison—see above

More types: Mystery, Humor, Exaggeration, Light, Jingles, Commercial, Protest, Political, Novelty Songs, Topical, Cajun, Gospel, Swing, Bluegrass, Rap, Rock

Comedy--Overview

When a character (or a world attitude) looks at things from a skewed point of view, you have a gap between the comic reality and the real reality comedy lives in that Gap
The comic character is a complete person but with a these elements:

- 1) **Comic perspective** is a unique world view that's at variance with normal reality.
- 2) **Flaws** are the elements that separate comic character from other people.
- 3) **Humanity** the quality that unites the comic character with the audience, building sympathy and empathy. We care about him.
- 4) **Exaggeration** is the force that works on all three (comic perspective, flaws, Humanity) to move a normal character further and further into the comic World. Exaggeration widens the gap upon which the comic premise of the character is built.

Comic Conflict IS: The usual struggle, but with above comic elements present

Types: 1) Man against nature, 2) Man against Man, 3) Man against Self.

If You Only Had A Brain Ken Booth **scaffolded off Yip Harburg's** *If I Only Had A Brain*

Global <Bleep> and Climate <Bleep> Art Crummer

The Eighth Day **Ron Johnson**

16t Avenue **Thom Schuyler**

Homegrown Tomatoes **Guy Clark**

I'd Rather Be Your #3 **Rebecca Kimmons & Art Crummer**

Tomorrow's Gonna Be A Better Day **Don Grooms**

I'm gonna' hire a wino to decorate our home **David Frizzell**

I never Ever Sing Old Lost Love Songs **Art Crummer**

Liver **Don Grooms**

Wry/Snide/ Edgy / Taboo

Rufus and Beverly **Mark Graham** Wild Side of Life **William Warren & Hank Thompson**

Love Yourself **Keb Mo'** Tennessee Waltz **Redd Stewart & Pee Wee King**

Strip Solitaire **Art Crummer**

Out Among The Stars **Adam Mitchell**

Hold Back The Waters **Will McLean**

Rainbows and Rivers **Frank Thomas**