

How to Transform a Good Book into a Great Book

July 19, 2018 – RWA National Conference

Presented by Robin L. Perini

A story recounts events that must be translated into feelings. It concerns . . . someone's reactions to what happens; his feelings; emotions; his impulses; his dreams, his ambitions; his clashing drives and inner conflicts. Plunge the character into a pre-planned situation that challenges the part of him that cares, that threatens the thing he feels is important. — Dwight V. Swain, Techniques of the Selling Writer.

A. Introduction

- i. Take what you want and leave the rest
What a writer ... "wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction...."when one begins to be persuaded that certain things must never be done in fiction and certain other things must always be done, one has entered the first stage of aesthetic arthritis, the disease that ends in pedantic rigidity and the atrophy of intuition." — John Gardner, The Art of Fiction
- ii. Pantsters, Plotters and Planners
 - i. What we have in common: Elements of Story
 - Character
 - Plot
 - Theme
 - Voice

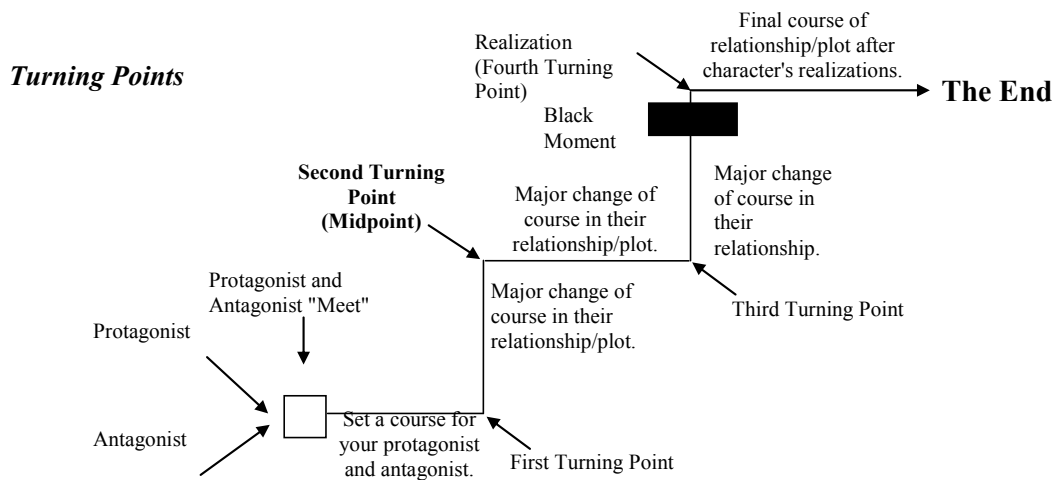
B. Non-Craft

- i. Life-long Learning
- ii. Discover your process
- iii. Discover YOUR Story
 - Uncover Your Emotional Cues (Laura Baker – Purposeful Writer)

C. Exploit Tension and Suspense (Not the Dead Body Kind)

- i. Hook the Readers
 - Openings
 - Beginning hooks (chapters and scenes)
 - Ending hooks (first page, third page, scene, chapter, book)
 - Character and Plot Surprises
- ii. Make the Reader Care
 - Characters that readers care about
 1. Put them in physical/emotional jeopardy
 2. GMC
 3. Character Arc
 - Dialogue
 1. Push the scene forward
 2. Build connection between reader and character
 3. Best way to evoke emotion

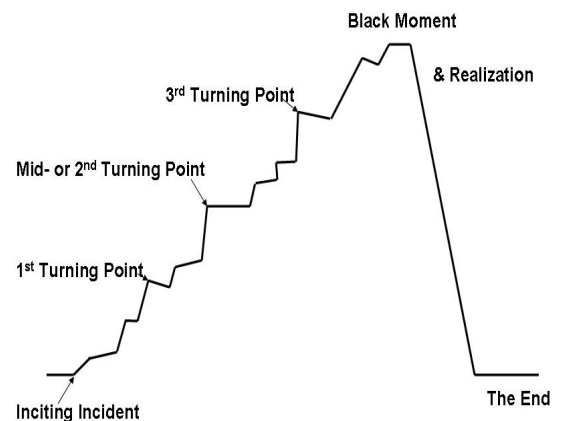
- iii. Turning Points and Reversals
 - Significant and surprising event, scene or series of scenes which change the direction of your plot or subplot for the character and the reader.
 - Turning points illustrate deep character, theme, braiding of internal/external conflict, layering through conflict, action, emotion and surprise
 - Attack your character's flaw
 - Escalate the stakes as you go from turning point to turning point. (escalate tension)
 - Build plot and emotions to and away from turning points (Arc of the TP)
 1. Major turning points every 20-25,000 words (or so) for a novel.
 2. No sagging middles



Story Board

For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points

Story's Inciting Incident	1	2	3	4	5	First Turning Point
	6	7	8	9	10	Mid or Second Turning Point
	11	12	13	14	15	Third Turning Point
	16	17	18	19	20	Black Moment
						Realization
						Fourth Turning Point



D. Leverage Emotion

i. Make Your Characters Special

- Character Goals
- Character's strength is their weakness
- Braid plot and character

ii. Actions don't drive the story.
 Actions drive emotions.
 Emotions drive the story. (Laura Baker)

iii. Make the villain the personification of your protagonist's flaw and takes advantage of the protagonist's flaw. (i.e. the real danger to your protagonist is their flaw)



Self-Image Worksheet

Strength	Character Flaw	Weakness
Strong-willed, deals w/people & ideas skillfully	Needs to Control	Manipulative
Lives in the Present	Fears the Unknown	Controlled by Circumstances
Self-Reliant	Needs Independence	Can't Rely on Others, Unreliable
Earnest, with conviction and purpose	Believes End Justifies Means	Ruthless
Strategist, careful, prepared, can be relentless	Fear of Failure	Tentative, Relentless
Power of Convictions	Needs Justice	Judgmental, Vengeful, Righteous
Intuitive understanding of others	Believes World there to be manipulated	Egotistical
Intuitive, Trusts inherent human judgment	Needs to Trust	Unrealistic
Faithful, Steadfast, Unflappable	Fears Chaos	Uncompromising, Resistant to change
Compassionate	Needs to Please	Failure to know oneself
Challenges Oneself	Need to Prove Worthiness	Self-Involved
Spontaneous	Needs Freedom	Undisciplined, Unpredictable
Perfectionist	Fears Misjudgment	Defensive
Fearless, Intrepid	Needs to Take Risks	Reckless
Independent	Fears Emotional Attachment	Distrusting
Cautious	Needs to be Safe	Fearful
Honest	Needs the Truth	Unemotional
Analytical	Needs Logic	Distrusts intuition, calculating, shrewd, cunning
Self-sacrificing	Needs Love	Submissive
Ability to be someone else (wears masks)	Believes Flawed	Covers Flaw with Mask
Adaptable	Needs Balance	Indecisive, Obedient
Flexible, Diplomatic	Fears does not know best	Pliant, Deferential
Optimistic	Needs to hope for the best	Naïve
Resourceful	Believes own needs surpass everyone	Predatory
Fearless, no fear of consequences	Fears Unredeemable	Pessimistic, Fatalistic
Faithful, Steadfast	Believes the best	Follows others blindly
Places no expectations	Believes love conditional	Fears Emotions
Free from bias, open-minded	Needs Fairness	Gullible
Patience	Believes to endure is to conquer	Compulsive, can't let go

- iv. Braid Overarching Message and Emotion
 - 1. Identify the protagonist's character flaw/internal conflict (based on emotion)
 - 2. _____ (protagonist) will [now or eventually] have to face and get past that he/she NEEDS/BELIEVES/FEARS

ii. Show, Don't Tell

- Show Emotions
- Show the Important: Description and Setting
- Activate Your Writing (SPICED)
 - 1. S-pecificity (including senses)
 - 2. P-owerful Verbs, etc.
 - 3. I-mage-making and picture-forming words
 - 4. C-ompelling Dialogue (Inner/Spoken)
 - 5. E-nding Hooks (And Openings) aka Surprises!
 - 6. D-eep Point of View

E. Be Aggressive During Revision

- i. Big Stuff (see everything above ☺)
- ii. Small Stuff
 - Dialogue is the best way to show character and emotion.
 - Is there a "zinger" on every page?
 - Can you tell whose POV it is on every page?
 - Word Choices
 - Active words
- iii. Three Versions – Example and Analysis of Transformation

F. Don't Edit out the Passion

- i. Let your Voice Shine Through.
- ii. Ray Bradbury says, "There is only one type of story in the world—YOUR story."

Character Sketch

(Thanks & Appreciation to Laura Baker - (Enter this into your computer and watch it grow)

Title of Work:

Character:

Sex: Age:

Height:

Weight:

Hair Color:

Eye Color:

Identifying Characteristics, description:

Beginning Situational Conflict:

Greatest Strength:

Why is the character this way?

Greatest Flaw (Internal Conflict):

How does person hide it, get around it?
Why does the character stay this way? What needs to happen to not be this way? Does this trait stay through the end of the book?
Greatest need or want (Long-Range Goal)?
Why is the need or want important? What's at stake? What will it cost this character?
How will meeting that need or want affect other characters?
Obstacles to meeting that need or want:
Short Range Goal:
Dark Secret:
Other personality characteristics, strengths:
Other Personality characteristics: weaknesses:
Greatest Fear:
Biggest Regret:
Most Powerful Dream:
What about this character conflicts with the other protagonist?
Romantic/Interpersonal Conflict (What's inside of him/her that keeps him/her from loving her/him):
Danger (If I love her/him . . .):
Darkest Moment:
What about this character renews the spirit of other protagonist?
How does greatest strength overcome the greatest weakness to produce a happy ending? What does character learn by the end of the book?

Bibliography

- Ballenger, Bruce and Barry Lane. *Discovering the Writer Within: 40 Days to More Imaginative Writing*. Writer's Digest Books, 1989.
- Bickham, Jack. *Scene and Structure*. Writer's Digest Books, 1999.
- Dixon, Debra. *Goal, Motivation and Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction*. Gryphon Books for Writers, 1999.
- Field, Syd. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. Dell Publishing Company, Inc. 1984.
- Frey, James. *How to Write a Damn Good Novel: A Step-by-Step No Nonsense Guide to Dramatic Storytelling*. St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction: Notes of Craft for Young Writers*. Vintage, 1991.
- King, Stephen. *Secret Windows: Essays and Fiction on the Craft of Writing*. Book of the Month Club, 2000.
- McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. Regan Books, 1997.
- Swain, Dwight. *Techniques of the Selling Writer*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1982.
- Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Michael Wiese Productions, 1998.

Biography

Internationally bestselling and award-winning author Robin Perini is devoted to giving her readers fast-paced, high-stakes adventures with a love story sure to melt their hearts. A RITA Award finalist and Romance Writers of America® (RWA) Honor Roll Member, she sold fourteen titles to publishers in less than two years after winning the prestigious RWA Golden Heart Award in 2011. An analyst for an advanced technology corporation, she is also a nationally acclaimed writing instructor and enjoys small-bore rifle silhouette shooting. As a result of her mother's battle with Alzheimer's Disease, Robin has become an advocate. She donates 10% of her royalties received from her novel, FORGOTTEN SECRETS, to the Alzheimer's Association. In addition, she started the 1 Memory Challenge, a challenge to encourage others to share memories and donate to the Alzheimer's Association, whose vision is a world without Alzheimer's. You can learn more and connect with her by visiting her website at www.robinperini.com or visit her on Twitter @RobinPerini, Facebook (RobinPeriniAuthor), Goodreads or Pinterest. Her literary agent is Jill Marsal of the Marsal Lyon Literary Agency.

SINGING RIVER LEGACY (Amazon's Montlake Romance)

Forgotten Secrets (2016) • Forgotten Legacy (2018) • TBD (2019)

MONTGOMERY JUSTICE NOVELS (Amazon's Montlake Romance)

In Her Sights (November 2011) • Behind the Lies (April 2013)
Game of Fear (August 2014) • Edge of Deceit (TBD)

CARDER TEXAS CONNECTIONS (Harlequin Intrigue)

Finding Her Son (March 2012) • Cowboy in the Crossfire (July 2012)
Christmas Conspiracy (December 2012) • Undercover Texas (June 2013)
The Cradle Conspiracy (December 2013) • Secret Obsession (August 2014)
Christmas Justice (December 2014) • San Antonio Secret (January 2017)
Cowboy's Secret Son (August 2018) • TBD (January 2019)

DARK GUARDIANS

Night of the Jaguar Son (2014) • The Ultimate Price (TBD)