-- TURNING UP THE HEAT --

TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING TENSION ON THE PAGE:

Drive toward crucible moments. *A crucible moment is a turning point in the life of a story's protagonist (generally). It is a moment of decision or critical action.*

After a crucible moment, the life of the protagonist and story characters will never be the same.

CRUCIBLE MOMENTS INCLUDE:

- Unexpected revelations or epiphanies.
- Lying to the self for purpose of maintaining the status quo.
- Coming to hard decisions or hard truths.
- Compromising values or morality in some unexpected way.
- Surprising the self with adherence to—or discovery of--values or moral code, when compelled.
- Being moved to unexpected physical action (sex, violence, other).
- Escape from conflict/failure to act.
- Major rejection of a plan, person or situation.
- Reluctant acceptance of a plan, person, or situation.
- Risking physical, psychological, professional or emotional death.
- Experiencing severe injury, physical loss, or death.
- A religious/spiritual experience of some kind.
- Loss of religion/spiritual certainty.
- Psychotic or emotional "break"/loss of normal mental equilibrium.

CREATING A BOILING POINT:

Crucible moments come when contents (of a character's life) are under pressure. *So, effective fiction finds ways to add pressure to a character's life, create a sense of apprehension and inevitability leading to the crucible moment, while playing out the lead-up to such moments.*

BOILING POINT CATALYSTS:

- Opposite types of people brought together.
- Characters who've injured each other in the past brought back together.
- Characters returning home to family wounds/family conflicts.
- A character as "fish out of water" in some environment.
- A day of reckoning or change for a community at a large.
- Sickness, death, or birth of a significant figure in the protagonist's life.
- Sexual desire leading toward fulfillment or rejection.
- A plan to end a significant relationship.
- Circumstances compelling a character to abandon the status quo and leave behind the familiar.
- A character making a new start: school, work, relationship, travel, relocating, etc.
- A character in desperate need of some resource: money, time, esteem, etc.

TENSION THROUGH "COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:"

When the reader is forced to entertain two contradictory ideas or emotions at one time, this creates a state of cognitive dissonance, an uncomfortable psychological state, which the reader will look to alleviate.

Cognitive dissonance is the foundation of "micro-tension."

WAYS TO CREATE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:

- Put readers into familiar narrative situations but deploy unexpected outcomes via character action or dialogue.
- Bring secondary or tertiary emotions to the forefront when characters react to conflict.
- Explore unexpected areas of internalization/motivation for viewpoint characters. Create unexpected *reasons* behind their actions.
- Explore incongruent visual details.
- Explore incongruent metaphors/figurative language to express an emotional state or set of circumstances.
- Remember that you're looking to take a reader to unexpected emotional places, but they should still be recognizably human/psychological justifiable. (In other words, you're going to lose the reader if characters just act like maniacs all the time with no rhyme or reason behind their feelings of actions. ☺)

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