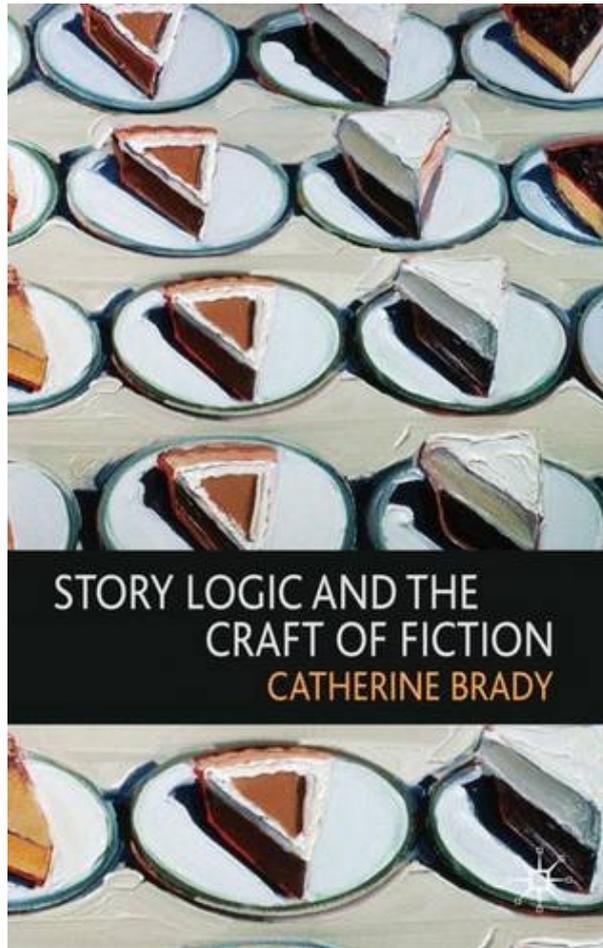
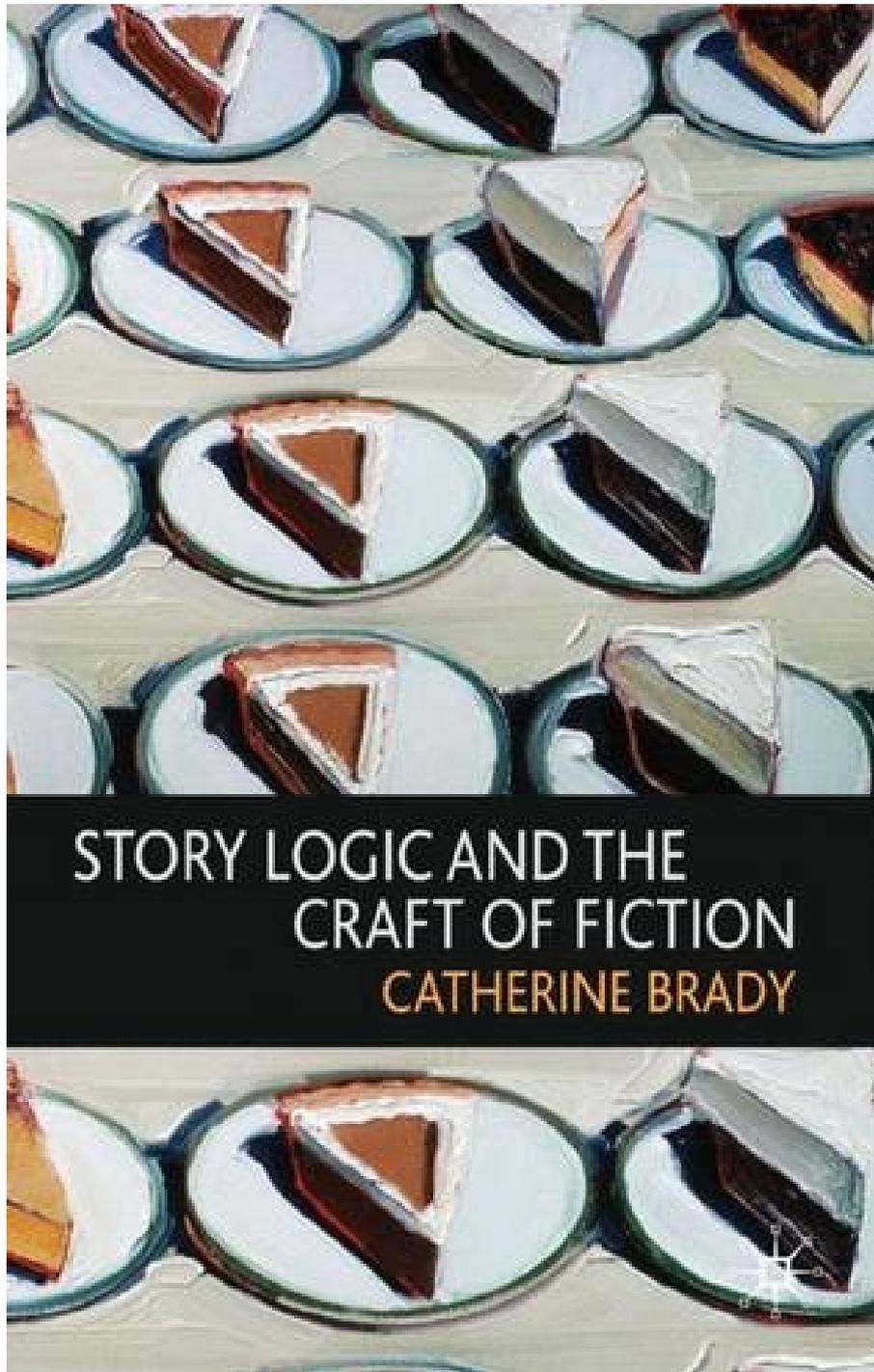


STORY LOGIC AND THE CRAFT OF FICTION BY CATHERINE BRADY



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This book illuminates how technique serves 'story logic,' the particular way fiction makes meaning. Writers raid the cupboard of theory looking for what works, and generic rules don't account for the rich variety of strategies they employ. For writers who are past the beginner stage, Brady offers a closer look at craft fundamentals, including plot, characterization, patterns of imagery, and style. The lively, lucid discussion draws on vivid examples from classic and contemporary fiction, ranging from George Eliot and William Faulkner to Haruki Murakami and Toni Morrison. Because it supplies the analytical tools needed to read as a writer, this text will enrich the reader's approach to any work of fiction, energizing discussion in a workshop or craft course.

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Techniques for Evoking Emotional Logic in Fiction

By Dr C J Singh

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Reviewed by C. J. Singh (Berkeley, California)

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Techniques for Evoking Emotional Logic in Fiction

Catherine Brady's *Story Logic and the Craft of Fiction* is intended for readers already familiar with a basic textbook used in writing courses-- books such as "Writing Fiction" by Janet Burroway, "Shaping the Story" by Mark Baechtcl, or "A Short Story Writer's Companion" by Tom Bailey. (See my reviews of these on amazon.com.)

In the opening chapter, Brady notes: "...Good fiction engages a reader in struggling to reconcile tension and inconsistencies" (p 4). As this engagement in literary fiction is achieved via subtext, the writer should strive "to sustain an enhanced ratio of subtext to text, and any methods that achieve this justify themselves. How all the elements of fiction work interdependently to serve this end forms the subject for this entire book" (p 7). The author presents several examples drawn from her teaching experience including a detailed analysis of Katherine Mansfield's much anthologized short story "The Garden Party"--one of my favorites. I tested the clarity of her analysis on a reader unfamiliar with the story. The reader understood it readily. The subsequent

chapters are replete with lucid craft-analyses of classic and contemporary works.

In the second chapter, aptly titled "Elusiveness at the Heart of Story Structure," Brady analyzes the emotional logic in short stories by Grace Paley, Junot Diaz, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Alice Munro. "What about novels?" I was asking myself. Brady notes: "The pressure for economy in a short story makes it a perfect vehicle for considering how writers make choices about such gaps, but the principle holds true for a plot of any length" (p15). Not to worry, the third chapter is titled "Chapter Structure and Shapeliness in the Novel" and includes analyses of William Faulkner's "Intruder in the Dust," and J. M. Coetzee's postmodern novel "Diary of a Bad Year." Despite my not having read the Coetzee novel, I understood her seven-page analysis. Brady is a master of expository writing.

The fourth chapter, "Three Key Strategies of Story Logic," explains peripheral detail, recurrence, and sequencing. It includes an analysis of Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio," as well as two examples of student manuscripts submitted in the author's MFA workshop courses. "In the kinesthetic play of ordering and reordering events and scenes and sentences, the trick lies in keeping a loose hold on intention while staying alert for any opportunities that arise. By lucky accident and persistence, playfulness can arrive at the right arrangement to make silence speak" (p. 69).

Early in the fifth chapter, "Captured in Motion: Dynamic Characterization," Brady writes: "The relationship between character and plot is something like a Mobius strip that reverses in itself endlessly; you need a plot to reveal character, and you need a character to capable of setting a plot in motion (p 73). The chapter includes analyses of James Joyce's story "The Dead" and Raymond Carver's "Careful," as well as Alice McDermott's novel, "Child of My Heart."

In the sixth chapter, "Point of View Q & A," Brady observes: "Overly scrupulous policing (especially in the workshop, by nature predisposed to fault-finding) pressures writers to sacrifice vitality to narrow notions of veracity" (p 101). Her detailed analysis of Alice Munro's "My Mother's Dream," told by the baby she's carrying, suggests that we could "accept it as a retrospective reconstruction of events the narrator has been told throughout her childhood" (p 105). Not that this is unprecedented: Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy," one of my favorite postmodern novels, was published in 1766.

Chapters seven and eight explain the use of synecdoche, metonymy, and patterning of imagery as craft elements in fiction. Brady analyzes Anton Chekov's "Gooseberries," with a helpful Venn diagram, as well as Michael Cunningham's novel "Hours." The ninth chapter, "Showing and Telling," explains how effective telling can artfully include showing as in Tobias Wolff's novel, "Old School."

In the concluding chapter, "The Sentence as a Touchstone of Style" Brady acknowledges that she can be "a grammar geek," and, but also adds, "Correctness counts, but to be merely correct is tantamount to entering a plow horse in the Kentucky Derby" (p 155). Brady diagrams sentences from George Eliot's "Middlemarch," William Faulkner's "Barn Burning," and Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway." She concludes with this advice: "Fiction is written sentence by sentence, and the habit of thinking about syntax as a dramatic element should be part of your composing process, not just a task reserved for revision. Despite all the advice books that recommend settling for a sloppy first draft and trusting to revision, a practice of indifference toward syntax usually means a writer will rely on conventional arrangement of works to order conventional ways of seeing. One sentence lead to another, and a bad sentence leads to another like itself" (p 169). Excellent advice for short-story writers. Novel writers would likely find it hard to follow and prefer settling for "a sloppy first draft," deferring concerns about syntax to subsequent drafts.

Brady's fiction-craft book is enhanced with excellent exercises for the intermediate/advanced student.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent book for broad story logic

By maureen onuigbo

Excellent book for broad story logic, context, themes and subtext. This book is compact and easy to read. It is full of good advice for the beginning and amateur writer. I love it. I stopped highlighting as it looked like I was going to highlight the entire book.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Story Logic

By goodsteward

This text is great for anyone interested in writing "flash" fiction, creative writing, and advancing in the area of English Language and Literature! Easy and fun read as well.

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