Novel and Play 7

* About subtexts

“How do I get from here to the Colosseum?”

“You take the road until you come to the end of it. Then ask the others.”

“Why do you want to go to the Colosseum when there’s so much fun to be had here?”

Suppose you want to express attraction in your novel. What words will you use? (think of subtexts/texts)

What habits have you seen in others? Swinging her legs? Twirling her hair? Biting his nails? Do you think there is subtext of nervousness? Anxiety? Fear?

How would you create a gesture that shows surprise? Shock? Fear?

Give me a scene in which words say one thing and the gestures say the opposite.

**Shattering Point of View**

1.

[The Liston sisters] were short, round-buttocked in denim with roundish cheeks that recalled that same dorsal softness. Whenever we got a glimpse, their faces looked indecently revealed, as though we were used to seeing women in veils.

Later

The party was just beginning to get fun when Cecilia slipped off her stool and made her way to her mother. Playing with the bracelets on her left wrist, she asked if she could be excused. It was the only time we ever heard her speak, and we were surprised by the maturity of her voice. More than anything she sounded old and tired. She kept pulling on the bracelets, until Mrs. Lisbon said, “If that’s what you want, Cecilia. But we’ve gone to all this trouble to have a party for you.”

Another example:

She yanked open the box, tossing the instructions in the direction of the trash can, and did the deed. Huddled on the toilet in the bathroom, tile cracked and shedding beneath her feet, staring at the pink line, pale as fading newsprint, her conscience caught up with her.

“It doesn’t get much lower than this, old Cordy, old sock,” she could hear Bean telling her cheerfully.

“How are you going to take care of a baby if you can’t even afford a pregnancy test?” Rose harped.

Cordy brushed our imaginary voices aside and buried the evidence in the trash can. It didn’t make a difference, really, she told herself.

2. (Yuknavitch, interview with *Fiction Advocate*)

I made formal choices the way that I did because the traditional formal choices available to me didn’t seem adequate for the story I wanted to tell. I didn’t want to write a book based on psychological realism. Nor one based on genre or fantasy nor historical fiction. I wanted to write a new kind of novel, where the formal play in the book connects to the corporeal and emotional experiences of women and girls. To do that, I had to abandon everything I’ve learned about literary traditions and reinvent story.

In place of stable individual characters, I created temporary and fragmented subjectivities. In this case their names became deprioritized while the state they are in at any given moment is amplified.

In place of character development I asserted emotional intensities—glimpses of people and things juxtaposed over time, sometimes in order, sometimes not, because that’s how we experience things—in pieces, not lines.

In place of linear plot I wove multiple story threads that braid or unravel or repeat of dissolve. I let form loose.

In place of a beginning that holds still and an ending that is stable and resolves things, I opted for something more like life—parallel possibilities that fracture and disperse between readers.

3.

And in this room, a silence that had once been a song.

And in this room, a light that had once been lightning.

And in this room, a heat that had once been a fire.

And in this room, a lump of silver that had once been a ring, two rings.

And in this room, the taste of burned hair. And in this room, its smell.

And in this room, the carapace of bees, long ago emptied.

And in this room, a wine bottle, full of the leavings of maggots but not maggots.

And in this room, a broken bowl of mirrors, reflecting nothing.

**Multi-point of view**

When the slip of the saw through trunk was buttery, liquid and verging on gentle, Geneva was moved to tears. Her body felt as though it were cutting through the tree. . . .

Cheri rounded the final corner at the coffee shop and noted that the light cast on the brock apartment buildings recalled the light on the brickwall. . . .

Renee felt the coming rush of customers like Harley motors thrumming down the highway. It was 4:30 when she and Rick took over from. . . .

Another example:

Researchers looked at magnetic resonance images of the brains of people who described themselves as newly in love. They were shown a photograph of their beloveds while their brains were scanned for activity. The scan showed the same reward systems being activated as in the brains of addicts given a drug.

Ca-ching! Ca-ching! Ca-ching!

For most married people, the standard pattern is a decrease of passionate love, but an increase in deep attachment. It is thought that this attachment response evolved in order to keep partners together long enough to have and raise children. Most mammals don’t raise their offspring together, but humans do.

There is nowhere to cry in this city. But the wife has an idea one day. There is a cemetery half a mile from their apartment. Perhaps one could wander through it sobbing without unnerving anyone. Perhaps one could flap one’s hands even.

Cf. *The Hours* (movie)

**Scene**

**Action**

Beginning

1. The news of Anders Eckman’s death came by way of Aerogram, a piece of bright blue airmail paper that served as both the stationery and, when folded over and sealed along the edges, the envelope. Who even knew they still made such things? This single sheet had traveled from Brazil to Minnesota to mark the passing of a man, a breath of tissue so insubstantial that only the stamp seemed to anchor it to this world.
2. She didn’t want to turn back the clock and choose between Anders and herself, to think about which one of them was more expendable in life’s greater scheme. She was sure she knew the answer to that one.

“You wouldn’t have died.” He was utterly clear on this point. “Whatever Anders did, it was careless. He wasn’t eaten by a crocodile. He had a fever, he was sick. If you were sick you would have the sense to get on a plane and come home.”

1. I was on fire.
2. And unlike five years ago, now I had a lead: Ashley.

There was something violent in the comprehension that this stranger, this wild magician of musical notes, was gone from the world. She was lost now, she’d been silenced—another dead branch on Cordova’s warped tree.

“Was it a homicide?”

Sharon shook her head. “No. She was a jumper.”

“You’re positive?”

She nodded. “No sign of a struggle. Fingernails clean. She took off her shoes and socks and placed them together at the edge. That kind of methodical preparation, very consistent with suicide. . .”