

ACTIVITIES

1 |

Take a well-known very short story (a fairy-tale for example) and rewrite it, adding one or several of the following:

- an embedded story,
- a surprise twist at the end,
- a subplot.

2 |

Read W. Somerset Maugham's summary of Maupassant's short story "la Parure" (See TIME, Activities, 2.), then write a slightly longer summary, adding one or several of the following:

- an embedded story,
- a surprise twist at the end,
- a subplot.

FURTHER READING

1 Accordingly, just as in the other imitative arts, the object of each imitation is a unit, so, since the fable is an imitation of an action, that action must be a complete unit, and the events of which it is made up must be so plotted that if any of these elements is moved or removed the whole is altered and upset.

Aristotle, *Poetics* VIII, CUP, 1959.

2 First, then, we warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the incidents in this our history as impertinent and foreign to our main design, because thou dost not immediately conceive in what manner such incident may conduce to that design. This work may, indeed, be considered as a great creation of our own; and for a little reptile of a critic to presume to find fault with any of its parts, without knowing the manner in which the whole is connected, and before he comes to the final catastrophe, is a most presumptuous absurdity.

Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, 1749, X,1.

3 For in this long digression which I was accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted) there is a master-stroke of digressive skill, the merit of which has all along, I fear, been over-looked by my reader, - not for want of penetration in him, - but because it's an excellence seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression; - and it is this: That tho' my digressions are all fair, as you observe, - and that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in Great Britain; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence.

I was just going, for example, to have given you the great outlines of my uncle Toby's most whimsical character, - when my aunt Dinah and the coachman came across us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system: Notwithstanding all this, you perceive that the drawing of my uncle Toby's character went on gently all the time; - not the great contours of it, - that was impossible, - but

some familiar strokes and faint designations of it, were here and there touch'd in, as we went along, so that you are much better acquainted with my uncle Toby now than you was before.

By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, - and at the same time.

This, Sir, is a very different story from that of the earth's moving round her axis, in her diurnal rotation, with her progress in her elliptick orbit which brings about the year, and constitutes that variety and vicissitude of seasons we enjoy; - though I own it suggested the thought, - as I believe the greatest of our boasted improvements and discoveries have come from some such trifling hints.

Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; - they are the life, the soul of reading; - take them out of this book for instance, - you might as well take the book along with them; - one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; - he steps forth like a bridegroom, - bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail.

All the dexterity is in the good cookery and management of them, so as to be not only for the advantage of the reader, but also of the author, whose distress, in this matter, is truly pitiable: For, if he begins a digression, - from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock-still; - and if he goes on with his main work, - then there is an end of his digression.

- This is vile work. - For which reason, from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going; - and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if

it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits.

From Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, 1761-1767, Volume 1, Chapter XXII.

4 There should be no episodes in a novel. Every sentence, every word, through all those pages, should tend to the telling of the story. Such episodes distract the attention of the reader, and always do so disagreeably. Who has not felt this to be the case even with "The Curious Impertinent" and with the history of "The Man of the Hill"? And if it be so with Cervantes and Fielding, who can hope to succeed? Though the novel which you have to write must be long, let it be all one. And this exclusion of episodes should be carried down to the smallest details. Every sentence and every word used should tend to the telling of the story.

Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (1883), ch. 12.

5 Henry James on "plot":

Trying to recover here, for recognition, the germ of my idea, I see that it must have consisted not at all in any conceit of a "plot", nefarious name, in any flash, upon the fancy, of a set of relations, or in any one of those situations that, by a logic of their own, immediately fall, for the fabulist, into movement, into a march or a rush, a patter of quick steps; but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a "subject", certainly of a setting, were to need to be superadded. [...]

I have always fondly remembered a remark that I heard fall years ago from the lips of Ivan Turgeneff in regard to his own experience of the usual origin of the fictive picture. It began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were. He saw them, in that fashion, as *disponibles*, saw them