

“SOUND” IN WRITING

<http://www.livewritethrive.com/2013/11/27/the-sound-of-sound-in-novels/>, C. S. Lankin

Sound may not be something writers pay much attention to when they work on their novels. Of course, there usually is a significant amount of dialog, and there may occasionally be found a noise shown in the scene, such as a branch cracking underfoot, the whoosh of an arrow zipping by, or the hiss of a snake. But other than the obvious, basic sounds, novelists don't usually think much about this sensory element. But by looking at some of the ways filmmakers deal with sound, we can see many possibilities of how writers might enrich their books with this often-ignored component.

Exploring the Perception of Sound

Writers are encouraged to infuse their novels with sensory details to better immerse the reader in time and place, and sound is a powerful sense. I've often envisioned the day when readers will be able to read my novels with my original soundtrack playing as they “turn pages” on their iPad, the music adjusting in speed to the speed of the reader so that the climactic symphonic rise pairs with the high moments of my scenes. I've often thought of talking to some of my Silicon Valley neighbors who design apps to work with me to create a prototype, but I imagine someone is already working on this.

Movie scores affect viewers powerfully, eliciting strong emotions that can make moviegoers cry and despair or feel their hearts soaring with joy...But until the day novels are paired with their own music scores that play while being read, writers will have to make do with other ways to portray music and sounds in their novels.

Many novelists mention various sounds occurring around their characters in scenes, and often to great effect. Good writers will evoke that unique sense of place by the clink of glasses, the tinkle of happy banter, the drip of a faucet in an abandoned building, the screech of tires from a car racing away from the scene of a crime. If you haven't spent much time thinking about sounds and their potential effect on a scene, I would recommend you do so.

Three Categories of Sound

Filmmakers classify sounds into three categories. First are natural sounds, ones that would normally be found in a particular environment, and those are the ones most novelists include in their scenes. Second are “expressive” sounds, and those are normal sounds altered by the perception of the character. For example, a phone could begin ringing louder and louder until the character either notices it or starts to scream in anger. Again, it's a matter of perception. Third are classified as “surreal” sounds. These externalize a character's inner thoughts, nightmares, wishes, or dreams. They are not real sounds; they are imagined. Think of a man who does something stupid and hears everyone laughing at him although their faces are emotionless.

Novelists can show their characters perceiving these surreal sounds, for their characters hear

them, whether they are real or not.

Emblematic Sounds

Sounds can be emblematic. The hum of a mosquito can be deafening and a recurring motif in an image system. Even the jangle of keys can be terrifying, as seen in the opening scene of the movie *E. T.* as the terrified little extraterrestrial runs from the men chasing him. You've probably watched movies in which all the sound is muted except for one isolated sound.

You Can Do It Too.

This isn't all that hard for novelists to emulate. By describing just how a character is perceiving the sounds around her, writers can essentially do the same. One sound out of many can be singled out, and that sound can even be symbolic or work as a metaphor as part of the image system. A loud heartbeat can override all other noises. Think of ways sounds can be used as symbols or motifs in your novel.

...Randy Thom, a Foley artist who has received numerous Academy Award nominations for sound in feature films, says...“Storytelling is about making connections between characters, places, ideas, and experiences. It isn't enough for a sound to be merely loud or high fidelity, or digital. It needs to remind you of, resonate with, other sounds places, feelings, in other times.”

This is good advice for novelists seeking to add touches of sound with a Foley artist's flair. So as you create and revise the scenes in your novel, try to wear this hat for a while and infuse your story with sounds in cinematic fashion. Just one more cinematic secret that will help supercharge your novel.