

**AUTHORSHIP; A
GUIDE TO LITERARY
TECHNIQUE**

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Authorship; a guide to literary technique by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

**AUTHORSHIP; A
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TECHNIQUE**

AUTHORSHIP

A Guide to Literary Technique

By

A WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR

L O N D O N
LEONARD PARSONS

CONTENTS

	CHAPTER I.	PAGE
INTRODUCTION		5
	CHAPTER II.	
BASIC PRINCIPLES		12
	CHAPTER III.	
CHARACTER		27
	CHAPTER IV.	
CHARACTER AND CHARACTERISATION		37
	CHAPTER V.	
PLOT		50
	CHAPTER VI.	
DIALOGUE		63
	CHAPTER VII.	
SCENE AND SETTING		77
	CHAPTER VIII.	
THE NOVEL		91
	CHAPTER IX.	
THE SHORT STORY		106
	CHAPTER X.	
DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE, I.		121
	CHAPTER XI.	
DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE, II.		135
	CHAPTER XII.	
THE CINEMA PLAY		152
	CHAPTER XIII.	
SENSE AND SUCCESS		172
INDEX		189



AUTHORSHIP

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP is an art.

It may also be the means of acquiring wealth, but whatever else it may or may not be, emphatically it is an art ; and therefore, within limitations it can be taught. When you come to examine a great piece of literature, a fine novel, a good story, or a convincing play, there is not, as many timid aspirants imagine, some terrible secret first to be unearthed. Of course luck plays its part in writing as in painting or trading or stockbroking : but, granted certain mental and temperamental endowments, there is no reason why there should not be far more and better novels, short stories and plays. Too often a clever, inexperienced writer has failed to attain, simply because of ignorance in technique. He does not know the very essentials of the literary art, and after a long series of failures, he has at last given up the contest and taken up some other career.

It is quite possible that thus a great loss has been incurred to literature. His fine, sensitive mind ; his fresh originality and wealth of ideas, have thus been prevented from finding their sphere of useful-

ness. He has written manuscript after manuscript, he has bombarded editors and publishers and others, but the fire has been returned with the same missiles. Finally, he has been overcome by despair : he cannot understand the reason for his failure, and anyway he is now sick of the whole subject. The root of the trouble is that the aspirant has not realised that he has no right to succeed until he has struggled to learn the rules of the art. It is an extraordinary fact that because every moderately educated person is supposed to know how to speak correctly and write a grammatical letter, he cannot realise that there is something else which has to be learnt before he can get deep down into the hearts of his readers and rouse their emotions.

And yet, just as you study painting before you can expect to place your ideas in pictorial form, so it is only reasonable that before you can expect to demand the attention of the public through the printed or spoken word, you ought at least to know how to do this. Every particular art has its rules, and yet art generally has certain fundamental rules which are applicable to all. That is why it so often happens that an artist in poetry is an artist in painting. A great actor may be a great musical composer, or a playwright a clever sculptor. Every artist has already in him the essential attributes well developed and ready for his other art ; and for him there is far less to be learnt than in the case of the aspirant who has never studied art of any kind, but just walked boldly into writing and been surprised that success was not ready to shake him by the hand at the first effort.

In this volume, then, we shall make it our study to find out what is the technique of the author's art in regard to fiction, using this in its broadest expression, and to show the rules which must be obeyed by him who expects to succeed. It is true, of course, that there are geniuses who are so richly endowed by nature that they can break every rule in their art and yet attain magnificently. These are the exceptions. It must not be forgotten, all the same, that technique is merely the means to an end. There is a danger in thinking so much of the manner of telling the story, that the story itself is lost sight of. In the history of painting, as soon as artists began to think more of their technique than of the subject, art began to decline. For whether you intend to be a great painter, novelist, poet, playwright, sculptor, or any other kind of artist, your aim will be to express great ideas, to show a knowledge of life well conceived and accurately observed.

Within you is the soul of the artist. You, being an artist, are sensitive to sounds and colours and contrasts which have failed to touch the average human. Being an artist, too, you have a keen, sympathetic, penetrative insight into the ways of human nature; and you have as your essential endowment such a vivid imagination that it responds at once to the right note and is pained by anything out of tune. The result is that much more of life reaches you than ever touches the other man. Your whole nature by endowment and training ought to be such that you are able to present all this observation, all these human happenings in

such an entertaining form that the average man will not only be attracted, but will agree that your observation is accurate, that the characters are true to life and that by your skill you have been able to show him something of his fellow men and women which he himself had failed to notice.

The technique of the author has to be learnt merely in order that his means of addressing the reader may be the more efficient, just as an actor has to learn to say his lines in such a manner that they will 'get over' the footlights, across the intervening space into the emotional part of the audience's anatomy. It is the function of all art to appeal by means of the senses, and unless it rouses the emotions it is not good art. By illuminating certain characters acting in a certain manner, it adds to our greater knowledge of human nature; it shows man to man, it reasons and sums up for us by indicating human cause and effect in regard to conduct. The effect of a certain law on a number of characters, for instance, was shown in Clemence Dane's successful play "A Bill of Divorcement." The author, by her observation, her understanding and study of human nature; her imagining of certain possible situations, was able to place before the average man and woman a knowledge of life, a piece of information, which you were compelled to take notice of because the appeal was made to your sense of pity, indignation, humour, surprise and other emotions. Finally you considered these characters and their actions in the light of reason; but it was only because the author had arranged her situations and scenes, contrasted her characters,