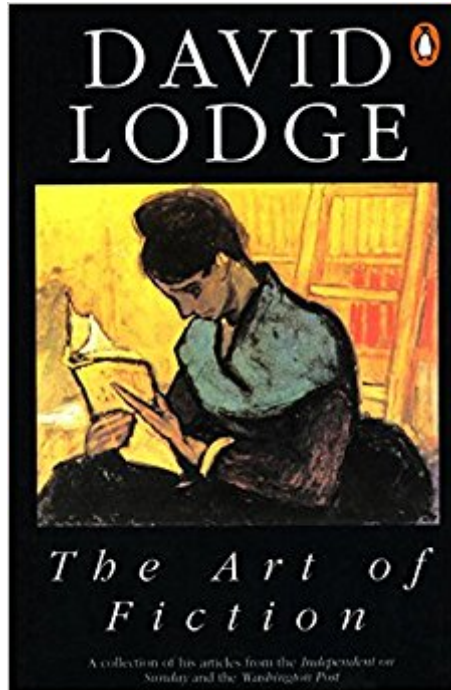


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The Art Of Fiction: Illustrated From Classic And Modern Texts



Synopsis

The articles with which David Lodge entertained and enlightened readers of the Independent on Sunday and The Washington Post are now revised, expanded and collected together in book form. The art of fiction is considered under a wide range of headings, such as the Intrusive Author, Suspense, the Epistolary Novel, Time-shift, Magical Realism and Symbolism, and each topic is illustrated by a passage or two taken from classic or modern fiction. Drawing on writers as diverse as Henry James and Martin Amis, Jane Austen and Fay Weldon and Henry Fielding and James Joyce, David Lodge makes accessible to the general reader the richness and variety of British and American fiction. Technical terms, such as Interior Monologue, Metafiction, Intertextuality and the Unreliable Narrator, are lucidly explained and their application demonstrated. Bringing to criticism the verve and humour of his own novels, David Lodge has provided essential reading for students of literature, aspirant writers, and anyone who wishes to understand how literature works.

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Customer Reviews

David Lodge states in his introduction, "This is a book for people who prefer to take their Lit. Crit. in small doses," and this, indeed, is an accurate categorization for Lodge's, *The Art of Fiction*. This is a collection of articles on various topics of writing that he wrote during a stint with the Washington Post. While more experienced writers may find his fifty topics of writing, ranging from quite literally "Beginning[s]" to "Ending[s]" and some "Metafiction" or "Sense of Place" in between, somewhat elementary in their discussion, a beginning writer may find his book more useful. Lodge is a fan of the classics. This is apparent in his choice to begin each chapter with an excerpt from authors such

as Henry James, Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce, though more contemporary authors like Martin Amis and Anthony Burgess are slipped in every so often. And arguably, it was a wise choice of Lodge's to use classics as his examples if the beginning writer is his target audience so as to transmit a sense of what is conventional before launching off into magic realism. But be forewarned-Lodge terms his topics "doses" in the introduction as though implying his discussion will provide some sort of cure to the ailing writer-when, in fact, we all know the writing process does not have solutions or cures that suddenly make it easy to sit down and type away for two hours. Roughly three to four pages are devoted to each topic which give the book, as a whole, the feel of "Learning to Write in Twenty-Four Hours." In Lodge's defense, however, he does provide a quick, concise discussion that will serve as both a quick introduction to the beginner and a quick refresher to the more advanced writer.

"The Art of Fiction", not surprisingly, is a popular title. In addition to this entry by David Lodge, identically entitled works (albeit with different sub-titles after the seemingly ubiquitous colon) are available from John Gardner and Ayn Rand (in her case, one more example I suppose that "art" is in the eye of the beholder). I gather that the Gardner and Rand volumes are along the lines of "how-to" manuals for aspiring writers. Lodge's book, however, is written not for writers but rather for readers, especially intelligent devotees of the novel who are not steeped in academic literary theory. THE ART OF FICTION is a collection of newspaper columns (revised for this publication) that Lodge originally wrote around 1991 for "The Independent on Sunday" on fifty different literary devices or principles. Each is illustrated with one or more excerpts from classical or modern texts. For example: "Point of View" is illustrated by means of an excerpt from "What Maisie Knew" by Henry James; "Stream of Consciousness" -- "Mrs. Dalloway" by Virginia Woolf; "Introducing a Character" -- "Goodbye to Berlin" by Christopher Isherwood; "Allegory" -- "Erewhon" by Samuel Butler; and "Metafiction" -- "Lost in the Funhouse" by John Barth. The pieces average four-and-a-half pages, so they are easily digested in five to ten minutes. Lodge's discussion of his various literary topics is well-informed, intelligent, clear and concise. Blessedly, he avoids pedantry. In passing, he offers many brief opinions on matters literary (for example, Henry James is "the first truly modern novelist in the English language," and "the first great surrealist novel in the English language was arguably Alice in Wonderland").

This book is a collection of texts on literary criticisms which the author had published in the form of a weekly column on a newspaper. The first chapter is entitled "The beginning", and the last chapter is

entitled "The end". There are 50 chapters in total, and they all deal with different aspects of the art of fiction: suspense, surprise, introduction of characters, time, repetitions, intertextuality, unreliable narrator, stream of consciousness, metafiction, etc. etc., giving examples from classic and modern literature. It is intended for anyone interested in literature from the position of either readers, and/or writers, and/or literary critics. The book is a great learning tour, giving sort of an insider's view on what authors had in mind, what their intentions might have been when writing certain things a certain way, how they exercised certain styles, how they were influenced by other authors, and how literary critics approach and analyze literary works. A lot of literary criticism related vocabulary is introduced, and some of it is not really common, maybe not even for crosswords. A neat glossary of those terms put all together would have been great, but there is no such glossary. And if you want to quickly find where a specific literary term is used, or where a book is mentioned, then you are in bad luck, at least in the Spanish edition I read. There is only an "Index of Names" at the end, which includes just the names of writers. This is the only major flaw I find in this book: it lacks a comprehensive alphabetical index. Out of the 50, there were only three chapters that I really did not like: #32 (Epyphany), #39 (Irony), and #48 (Narrative Structures).

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