

Crystal Person-Tillman

ENG 483

Metonymy to Synecdoche Analysis (Part 2)

Title:

A Magical Persuasion: Engaging the Audience in Truth

Audience:

Dr. Julie Jung and ENG 483 class

Purpose:

In my metaphor analysis, I stated that King is “a synecdoche for what it is to be a popular fiction author” and “he is in an important place for my exploration as to the ways authors . . . frame the role of the editor in their writing” (1). In this analysis, I want to expand on King’s metaphor of the writing process as “magical” and its relationship to “truth” and explore the ways in which King’s position in the writing industry makes these metaphors representative of the editor-author relationship during the writing process. If King is a synecdoche for “author,” the metaphors he uses to describe the writing process will reveal the synecdoche for the editor’s role in the writing process. It will also reveal the ways in which the editor-author relationship does *not* fit into the metaphor of writing as a magical process that expresses/produces truth.

The Editor's Role as Magician's Assistant

The metonymic reduction of the editor's role to assistant to the magician has implications for the way the author-editor relationship is understood. The editor as assistant to the magician is put into the role of the person who understands how the writer writes (the writer's style), but she is in the background and does not necessarily have any control over the illusion. Although the magician and the assistant know the illusions inside and out because they would not be able to perform the illusions convincingly without this knowledge, the assistant, on the surface, plays nothing more than an aesthetic role in the performance of the illusion. So, if the magician and the assistant both know how everything works inside and out, why does the magician need the assistant? What vital role does the editor play in this metaphor?

The metaphor of writing as magic implies there is an unknown element to writing that the author is not in control or aware of. Because the idea of magic is supernatural and is not governed by the laws of natural science, magic in the writing process implies that at some point, the author cannot completely explain how or why she has come up with a particular idea. If the author can't explain or understand it, how is the editor ever expected to completely explain or understand it in order to perform her role as editor? The assistant to the magician knows everything that the magician knows, but could she possibly know more? Or are her knowledge and skills simply different from the magicians? The assistant is the one who gets into the box and pulls down the mirror that makes it look like she has disappeared while the magician waves her hands and says the magic words. Here, the editor performs the mechanical and technical work in the writing process while the author invents a story that engages the audience's imagination (or, in the case of informative or technical writing, engages the audience the text's rhetorical purpose). The assistant plays a different role in the illusion than the magician: she pulls the levers and slips out the secret passage in order for the magician's illusion to be convincing to the audience. The magician may

know how to do these things as well, but her role is to decide on what the illusions will be and use her own style to make them look real. The outward role of the assistant is to play lovely assistant to the talented magician, but the assistant's role is decidedly more than that.

The unknown element of the illusion, however, is still a mystery. What is the magic and where does it come from? King asserts in *On Writing* that the magic in the writing process comes as inspiration after much practice, writing, and thought (138-9). If this is true, how can the editor help the author wield and encourage this inspiration? Also, how can the assistant help the magician understand this mysterious component of the illusion? And, ultimately, what *is* this mysterious component the magician does not understand, and is it necessary for the assistant to know what it is?

The editor is the person who recognizes that writing is not simply "magic." The editor recognizes that writing is an act of persuasion. The text must have a clear rhetorical purpose; whether the purpose is to inform, instruct, provoke thought, move, confuse, horrify, or simply entertain, the editor must have a clear vision of the purpose of the text. As assistant to the magician, the editor must understand the way the illusions work in relation to the audience, to persuade that audience that what it is watching is "real." The editor knows that the audience needs to be persuaded to be *informed, instructed, provoked*, etc. Whether the author is aware of, acknowledges, or understands the way her writing persuades an audience, the editor must understand how the audience can be persuaded by a text. The editor must be able to analyze this, to understand how it applies to the rhetorical purpose of the author's text, and to know how she can edit the author in such a way to assist in that persuasion. As I will later discuss, however, the irony is that the assistant to the magician metaphor is problematic for the way the editor and author share this role of persuading an audience.

In the metaphor of author as the magician and the text as the illusion of reality that is presented to the audience, the effective magician has worked very hard crafting her illusion, practicing, thinking through her illusion, but presents it to the audience as if it is effortless and natural. There is no magic when the magician reveals “how it’s done” to the audience; although there are many people who find this interesting and enjoy finding out how it works, it takes the form of a “how to” demonstration rather than a magical illusion. This illusion of effortlessness and naturalness is assisted by the editor’s editing for the audience. The magic is in how the author and her editor present the illusion to the audience. In order to maintain the illusion, the author and editor must make it seem like the story, characters, plot, and subject is the reality (not just a trick); the writing process has gone through countless drafts, re-writes, edits, and changes that reveal the work and craft behind the writing, but the audience rarely, if ever, sees this. The final product is where the illusion is presented to the audience. King uses the metaphor of magic to represent how the audience reads his writing (as the illusion of reality) and to refer to how the writing process takes as much work and crafting as a magician creating an illusion. The magic comes in only after the study, practice, and training has been done because it is simply the product of a mind invested in the illusion as reality.

In King’s metaphor, the writing process is metonymically reduced to a magical process that produces/expresses truths. When King refers to writing as magic, he is making a claim about writing and the writing process. For example, when he refers to the muse, his descriptions of the magical aspects of writing sound like what some would call creative insights or inspiration (138-9). When he asserts that this inspiration and insight comes only after much practice and thought, he is talking about the process of writing leading to a deserved reward, magical muse or otherwise. The hard work of crafting a story and characters comes in the writing, re-writing, editing, and re-writing again process that he says is of vital importance to becoming a better writer (or a writer at all).

Writing as a *craft* is important to this metaphor because it implies that the work is necessary to the final product, the magic does not come out of nowhere. And, if the magic does not come out of nowhere, there is a way to explain magic in the process of writing. This explanation and analysis is the editor's job in the process. The editor must be able to identify how and when the magic comes and understand it so that she can assist the author in wielding and encouraging this magic. This is facilitated through the editing of style, story, structure, and voice the editor does for the purposes of persuading the audience to engage with the rhetorical purpose of the text, which reminds the author of the importance of persuading the audience.

Within this metaphor for the process of writing, the editor fills the role of assisting the magic by facilitating the process of writing as well as the success of the final product (whether that success is a modest reception by a small audience or mass appeal and large sales). In order to facilitate the process of writing, the editor must remind the author of the audience. The editor must remind the author that she must persuade the audience to engage with the text's rhetorical purpose. This is the editor's goal for the text in order for it to be a success, and the author needs to understand this purpose as well. The author as magician metaphor, however, implies that the magician knows how best to persuade the audience of the reality of the illusion because the magician is in control of all elements of the performance. This problematizes the metaphor because, in order for the editor to be an effective assistant, it necessitates the magician give some of the role of persuading the audience to the assistant; thereby, the assistant would play a vital role in persuading that audience. The author then becomes the performer and visionary behind the creation of the illusion, and the editor plays the significant role of making that illusion persuade the audience of its reality. In the metaphor, the editor as assistant would need to be behind the scenes facilitating the author as magician in making the illusion look effortless and as real as possible. The editor would need to be the one to work out the mechanical, technical, and stylistic aspects that the magician invented and

needed help perfecting. It would need to be a magician that is willing to give up some of their creative power in order to persuade the audience to the illusion. The question is, are there any magicians willing to do this? Are there magicians that give that kind of power to their assistants? And, if they do, would they ever admit or acknowledge that the assistant played such a vital role?

The truth is that, whether the magician admits it or not, the assistant does play a vital role in persuading the audience of the illusion. The assistant may not have a hand in every illusion, and she may not get the credit she deserves, but the assistant is the one behind the scenes of the illusion that the audience does not see and will never see (for that is the crux of the illusion). Any magician who has once been an assistant or knows the importance of a good assistant, knows how vital the role is that an assistant plays in persuading the audience that the illusion is real. If the author has ever had the experience of being behind the scenes, assisting the magical process by going over each and every aspect of the text with the audience in mind, the author will understand the importance of engaging and persuading an audience; therefore, she will understand the vital importance of a good editor. The author will then understand that creative inspiration is simply a product of her and her editor's hard work and practice rather than a "magical" influence. The editor understands that magic in the writing process is a metaphor that is used to explain that which the author cannot explain fully (or that which the magician cannot attain without assistance), but it is something that an editor must understand in order to facilitate the writing process. And in order for the editor to understand how the illusion persuades an audience, she must understand the rhetorical purpose of the author's text.

The True Irony of Magic in Writing

"Truth" in this metaphor is important because it makes a claim about the purpose of writing and the reason why texts are persuasive. King expresses the importance of fiction to express some kind of truth (155). He asserts that the illusion that is created by the author is for the purpose of

expressing something greater than the story on the page. The “truth” in the writing is expressed through the performance of the illusion. The audience is expected to take the illusion as pious and connect to the reality because it expresses a truth about themselves. Whether it is through the characters, story, theme, or some unknown, the audience is supposed to see themselves in the illusion. The use of truth in this metaphor is King’s way of explaining how writing is supposed to affect the audience: through truth and identification. The editor’s role here is to assist the author in expressing this truth and encouraging identification.

The implications of metonymically reducing the writing process to a magical illusion that expresses truth are many. The claim that magic in the writing process (creative inspiration and insight) comes from hard work, practice, and study implies that those who do all of these things can create a story that expresses a truth to which an audience will attach itself. “Truth,” however, is problematic because it is different for all people. How can an author be expected to perform an illusion of reality that will bring audiences in and tell them something about themselves if each individual in the audience is different? That author (a “bad” author) is often reduced to using clichés. In this instance, the audience will either recognize these as such or recognize themselves in the clichés; in some cases, the audience will do both, choosing to ignore that it is a cliché. An ironic point in this metaphor is when the expression/production of truth is the exact opposite of the rhetorical purpose of the text. Not all authors would agree that their writing expresses “truth.” Many would argue the opposite: ambiguity, choice, and ambivalence are all common themes for a piece of creative writing. Authors who are looking to complicate issues of identity and truth would argue their work forces the audience to go beyond identification. Authors that want to promote the questioning of what is true and real would not say that their writing expresses or produces truth.

Ultimately, the metaphor of magic and truth in writing begs the question of what “truth” will engage an audience with the story, and how does a writer go about expressing this truth. The role of

the editor plays an important part in how the author performs this truth-telling illusion. Although King admits magic and truth only come out of hard work and practice (not out of some supernatural element), the terms “magic” and “truth” are problematic because they are very difficult to define: magic implies something supernatural that does not follow laws of nature, and truth is different for everyone. Another irony is that if truth is not universal, it is difficult if not impossible to define anything as true. A fictional story that expresses truth for everyone that reads it, for instance, is not only impossible to identify but impossible to create. It is not unlike a magical illusion: the magician and her assistant set out to make an audience believe that their illusion is not an illusion, but reality; nevertheless, the audience knows that the assistant has not been sawed in half and miraculously put back together (unless they are a child or naïve adult, the existence of this kind of magic is recognized as impossible). The job of the magician and her assistant is to make the audience engage with the illusion so deeply that it questions how they could possibly make it all look so real if it wasn't. The author and her editor's job is to make the audience of the text engage with the story so deeply that it persuades them to its rhetorical purpose. The problem is, once again, that each audience member is different in such drastic ways that it makes it impossible for everyone in the audience to be persuaded by the same presentation of one truth. While a magician and her assistant can focus on convincing a specific audience of the truth of their illusion, they cannot hope to convince or engage everyone. While an author and her editor can focus on engaging a specific audience, they cannot hope to engage them as a whole. To express truth in a story, to evoke identification, then, needs to be individualized according to purpose and as much of the audience that they can hope to persuade.

So, where does the editor come in the creation of this illusion of truth? In this metaphor, the editor is the only other person who understands how the illusion is performed, and the editor helps the author make that illusion as close to “truth” as possible. The assistant helps the magician create and practice the illusion by playing a role in the illusion – the process and product of writing.

The assistant helps the magician perform the illusion by making everything seem as close to real as possible. She does this by being a good actress, relating to the audience through her appearance as one of the audience (especially if she is planted in the audience as a volunteer), and, more often than not, being physically attractive. Although this points to the way the editor's role is one of making the text more aesthetically pleasing, the truth is that the assistant does much more than stand there and look beautiful. The correctness, gracefulness, and aesthetic qualities of a text are a huge help in engaging the audience, but the editor's role as assistant to the author is one that is much deeper in the text that most never truly realize, or at least never witness. One of the editor's roles that complicate the metaphor of truth and magic in writing is her role in identifying the audience as accurately as possible in order to engage them in the text. It is more likely that the magician would be the one who would have that ability and know-how, with her style, practice, and knowledge of the importance of the audience. King, however, is an author who actually fits in this role as knowledgeable magician more than most authors do.

King as Magician and Author

Stephen King is arguably the most popular fiction writer of the past thirty years. This fact and because he is an author who knows his audience, has a solid position in the suspense, sci-fi, fantasy, and horror genre(s), and wrote a book about his writing process makes King a perfect synecdoche for "author." Using King as a synecdoche for author induces the public to think of all authors as fiction writers and to see all authors in relation to King. His memoir, *On Writing*, is then a synecdoche for the writing process and represents all elements of the writing process (from the conception to final product) as such.

The implications of metonymically reducing King to stand for all authors causes the public to see authors who don't write material that entertains mass amounts of people as King as less than an author. This reduction becomes problematic because it dismisses authors (from professional to

creative writers) who do not fit into this category. They are either doing something wrong, don't write well enough, or don't know their audience as well as King does. If King is understood to represent what an author is, then *On Writing* is understood as the guide to popularity and success in the creative writing genre. This means that his view of the writing process is seen as the way things *are* in the writing process. *On Writing* becomes the ultimate advice for creative writers. For example, King's claims about fiction writers not completely understanding what they do and the importance of "magic" in the process of writing leads to the assumption that fiction writers don't analyze their writing process, and that it comes to them naturally (xiv-vii). This, however, is problematic when there are examples on the contrary of fiction writers who claim to know exactly what they are doing. The statement is also ironic in the light of the purpose of his book, to give advice and describe his writing process. Although he claims to not completely understand what it is he does, he seems to have a handle on how to write for his audience very well.

That King knows his audience as well as he does is important in understanding the implications of the metaphor of writing as a magical process that expresses/produces truth. If King is a synecdoche for author, he is the ultimate magician. He is the magician that knows his audience very well and knows exactly how to engage them in his illusion. He developed an audience at the beginning of his career with hits like *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, and *The Shining*. These novels helped to establish him a solid audience in the genre of horror. Since then, he has expanded his writing to include many other genres. Subsequently, he has developed a wider following. Although these forays into other genres may not have been as popular as his horror writing, they are all in related genres that include some of his former audience as well as new audiences. For example, he wrote a series of novels and stories that fit better into the genres of supernatural, *The Green Mile*, mystery, *Dolores Claiborne*, coming of age/mystery, *The Body*, and satire/suspense, written under the pseudonym Richard Bachman, *The Long Walk*. All of these short stories and novels and more,

including *On Writing*, show not only how well King knows his own audience, but how well his metaphor of author as magician works to fit his ability to persuade and engage an audience, new and old.

As previously asked, if the magician knows exactly how to perform the illusion to the audience to the best effect, why does she need the assistant? Does the assistant simply act as an aesthetically pleasing but mechanically and physically talented attachment to the magician? Ironically, although the metaphor that King uses fits well into his position in the writing industry, it does not always (if rarely) represent the editor and author relationship. Although very popular and widely selling authors may know their audience very well, and may know at least as much as their editors in the area of engaging an audience and persuading them to a certain rhetorical purpose, most authors don't know their audience, don't care to think about their audience, or don't have any idea how they could go about engaging and persuading an audience. The editor, like an assistant to a magician, is in the background, deals with the aesthetics and mechanics of the given text/illusion, and assists that author/magician in engaging the audience with the author/magician's individual style; nevertheless, they do much more than those things and must know exactly how to manipulate elements of the text in order to best engage the audience. The editor is the intermediary between the author and the audience. While the author creates and invents, the editor must work with the author's creations and inventions in order to hone them to the author's individual style. While an assistant may know just as much about how to engage an audience as the magician, this is not the most important part of her role of assistant. The assistant, like an editor, enhances the performance and style of the magician/author, but the editor does much more than enhance the author's style. This is where the metaphor truly falls apart.

The author does not always know the best way to perform her style. She may be inconsistent in her style, she may not be able to identify the most appropriate style for her audience,

or she may not be able to identify her style at all. Although it is not necessarily important for an author to know all of these things and be able to articulate them, it is of the utmost importance that an editor understands how to articulate all of these aspects of the author's style. The editor must be able to identify and analyze the author's style, know how to manipulate and "perfect" that style for an audience, and how to perform all of the mechanical aspects of the writing process in order to use this information. If, as King states, some authors do not know much about what they do, this is where the editor comes in and comes to understand what it is that authors don't understand, don't want to understand, or refuse to acknowledge: the existence and importance of the audience. As I have already stated, the magic in the writing process is in how the author and her editor present the illusion to this audience. When the audience engages with the illusion of the text, is persuaded in some way by its "truth," and, ultimately, finds the "magic" within the writing is when the editor should take her bow and know that she has effectively performed her part in the illusion.

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