

IMITATION

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If I were to summarise Aristotle's Poetics, I would say that stories are nothing but imitations of human nature and his actions. Shakespeare is said to be the best writer in the world because he can write about human nature better than anybody else.

As a writer-cum-professor, I attest to this fact.

'Show, not tell,' I learnt this maxim when I was twenty. Since then, I have repeated this maxim countless times. This maxim helped me write two fictional novels, and the third one was beginning to take its shape in my mind. The throbs of its creation bubbled up in the cauldrons of my mind. I felt excited and happy.

I started writing the first draft of my third novel in the index cards. It was easy to write on index cards. The need of having a personal diary to write a novel was eliminated. I just have to pull the index cards out from my pocket and I can write whatever event or dialogues effused in my mind.

During the journey of writing my third novel, I met an unexpected obstacle.

The obstacle which I encountered was the central character of my book. And a book is worthless if your central character is flawed. I simply, in aristotelian terms, could not control his actions in my book. And if you are a layman, what I mean is I was unable to write about him, his personality, his dialogues etc.

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Given my peculiar ailments, I resorted to the latter.”

At first, I was positive that I would be able to solve this problem. 'Stumbled upon an unexpected writer's block,' I thought and smiled, dismissing my pessimistic thoughts.

Another month passed by, and my daily routine was the same: teach my students who yearned to be a successful writer like me and rest of the time in college was spent discussing politics to art, and inconsequential gossip about students and staff alike.



I had given myself a deadline to finish the novel. I had planned it would take me less than five months to create a rough outline of the plot and at least one readable draft. None of these goals were realised.

I wanted the outline and the plot to orbit around my central character. But even after five months, I barely could write a single thing about him. Whenever I tried to control his actions and events, he would open up another thread of plot inside the story which I never imagined. This character, unlike my characters, was not submissive to my imagination. He would decide his own adventures and that would destroy my diligently created plot and themes of the story.

I can not describe the struggle between him and me.

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A year had passed, and I had failed to construct the story. He had shattered my every hope of being known as the author of three bestselling novels. I still worked in the same college but having resorted to alcohol, I soon lost interest in teaching students how to write, and I resigned from that place.

I had no aim except writing the third novel no matter how much time it would take. My wife, irritated by my so-called addiction to alcohol, left me. For me, it was no addiction, alcohol only served as a distraction from the pain that the unfinished draft of my novel gave me every passing day and night. With my wife gone, I decided to sell my house and decided to travel across various Indian states. In other words, I decided to have my own adventures.



I do not remember the exact time and date when I had experienced that throb in my brain which led me to write my third fiction piece. But that cursed character would pop up here and there during my travels. He was no longer fictional. I would sometimes feel his presence around me, sometimes I would recognise his face among the crowds, sometimes he would follow me up to my house and would disappear into nothingness.

I felt happy. The situation had been reversed. He, at last, wanted me to write about him. I was the only man who could pen his story and give a life to him. A life that he lived very splendidly, but was unknown to everyone except me.



One fine morning, I heard a knock at my rental room's door. I woke up expecting it was the cleaners. They arrived every Sunday to clean my room. I opened the door and saw him. He was standing exactly in front of me, his face was stern and his beard had grown more than I imagined. At first, I could not react and then I smiled and let him inside my room. I closed the door behind us.

I brought the chair from the kitchen but he was already sitting on my bed. I placed the chair in front of me and sat. I picked up the whiskey bottle from the floor and drank some without any water, I was accustomed to it. I offered him and he took a sip too. How much time passed between him and me without speaking to each other I do not know. But it was pleasant to sit in his company. He decided to break the silence.

'Why are you not writing my story?' he asked.

'You don't follow my pen.' I replied after some thoughts.

'But it is no fun being prisoner to your writing. I want to create my own story.' He said loudly.

'I won't write it any more.' I said with determination.

He sighed and stood up. I took another sip of whiskey. 'You don't know how it feels to be confined by your fancy, to imitate the actions you prescribe to me,' he said. I turned around and saw he was sobbing. He wiped his tears with the back of his hand and he started to speak but paused and left. That was the last time I saw him.

A thought arose in my mind, 'Who is writing my story?'

(Report published in the newspaper the next day: A dead body was found in one of the popular rental rooms of Delhi. The body had been identified. The body will be sent to the relatives concerned. Cause of death is said to be suicide. An empty bottle of poison was found near the body. The man had been said to struggle with schizophrenia.)



Khushwant likes to read books and watch movies (especially French).
His favourite author is Leo Tolstoy.

