

THE MOVIE EYE: USING FILM TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE YOUR FICTION

Alfred Hitchcock said, "Movies are real life with the boring parts cut out." That's true of fiction, too. The writer must balance a need to explain with a trust in the reader.

Evaluate scenes for dramatic potential by picturing them being filmed. Then ask yourself:

1. What is the scene's purpose? Common scenes that are often unnecessary:
 - Traveling and thinking scenes
 - Discussions or thoughts about back story (or what is often called "back story dump")
 - Logistical scenes (showing how the hero stole the horse point by point)
 - Planning scenes (where the character makes the plan to do something)
2. Whose point of view would best demonstrate your purpose? Think of who the camera should be on, and consider these:
 - Whose *outward* reaction would have the most dramatic impact?
 - Whose *inward* reaction would be the most interesting?
3. How do I set the scene without boring the reader?

Original version of description in *After the Abduction*:

Charnwood proved an impressive estate. From the moment they reached the edge, they were in awe. They rode a long while through pine forests and snow-dusted fields, all of it Templemore's. Rosalind remarked upon the quaint dairy buildings and Griff pointed out the neat half-timbered cottages of his tenants, but Juliet could see only that such an estate required a vast deal of wealth to maintain.

"For a man whose father was a notorious wastrel and whose ward consorts with smugglers, Templemore certainly seems to be doing very well for himself," Griff said, speaking aloud Juliet's own uneasy thoughts.

Soon they began an ascent up a low, wooded hill. When they shot out of the tree-bordered road onto a long, wide drive, they all gasped.

"Damnation," Griff said in awed tones. "Doing well isn't the half of it. I never expected Lord Templemore to be so rich."

Juliet hadn't either. The stately drive bisected ice-crust-ed lawns three times the length and breadth of those at Swan Park, her family's grand estate. On one side of the drive stretched formal gardens with snowy beds and man-made ponds knitted together by gravel paths and dainty bridges. On the other sat a knot garden and a hedge maze.

But it was Charnwood Hall, a sprawling edifice of pinkish brick, that stopped her breath in her throat.

Revised version:

As they trundled along mile after mile, Juliet's heart sank. Bad enough that the baron had the respect of his peers. Must he own half the land in the shire as well? This

didn't bode well for forcing him into revealing anything about his ward.

"There's plenty of room here to hide Morgan," Griff remarked.

"Plenty of room to hide him and plenty of wealth to feed him, clothe him, and keep him warm for a decade," Juliet grumbled. "I thought you said Lord Templemore's father ran the estate into the ground."

"That's what I'd heard. Apparently somebody resurrected it. It must have taken a fortune."

An understatement, to be sure. Thick stands of pine and oak stood sentinel to the busy efforts of workmen spreading compass on ice-crusting fields. Quaint, immaculately kept dairy buildings gave way to neat half-timbered tenant cottages. Why, the man probably had his own tannery and smithy and goodness knows what else.

Soon they began an ascent up a low, wooded hill. When they shot out of the tree-bordered road onto a long, forbidding drive, Juliet tensed.

Worse and worse. Charnwood's grounds were ten times grander than Swan Park's. The coldly elegant lawns seemed to stretch on forever beneath the wintry gray skies. The formal gardens were tediously beautiful, with gravel paths and dainty bridges knitting together newly turned flower beds and man-made ponds. There was an impressive knot garden and hedge maze, too, just to emphasize that the baron was a man of consequence.

As if Charnwood Hall wasn't enough to prove that. My oh my oh my. Only a dead woman could remain unimpressed by the sprawling ancient edifice of claret-hued brick. Compared to this stately matron, Swan Park was an upstart at her coming out.

4. Is the dialogue essential to characterization or plot?
5. Do you describe actions that simply move the character about? Look at the difference in these two paragraphs:

Slowly she went to the other side of the room, opened the desk drawer, and then fumbled through the drawer until she found a ribbon for her hair. After pulling her hair back into a thick ponytail, she tied the ribbon carefully around the glistening mass. She thought about what Tom had said and wondered why he was being so firm about his decision.

As she put her hair into a ponytail, she remembered Tom's words. Why was he being so firm about his decision?

6. Do you emphasize the wrong things? Or too many things?
7. Do the character actions/dialogue tags enhance the scene or simply provide filler?
8. Do you show emotion by telling us instead of showing us?
9. Is the scene dramatic?
10. For romance novels, does the scene further the romance?