

AUTHOR INTRUSIONS (a.k.a. - Authorial or Narrative Intrusions)

? - **What are they?** Generally they are anomalies, oddities, where the writer has interrupted the story or writing and projected him- or her-self into the story or article.

TYPES -

- informative
- instructive
- leading or guiding
- explanatory
- teaching
- other ways the author interrupts and projects self into it

For some types of writing it is acceptable and even expected.

- Some plays or prose use it for effect. example - when all other characters freeze or ignore while one of the characters turns and has an 'aside' conversation with the audience).
- Rudyard Kipling's 'Just So' stories use authorial intrusion purposely.
- The author of Jane Eyre, say something like - "What else can I tell you, reader, she married him." Instead of reading about the marriage taking place through the actions and dialogue of the characters, the author intrudes (or pauses) the story and tells the reader her characters got married.
- There are stories where the fictional character is telling the story and thus are allowed these 'intrusions'. In the book, *'The Princess Bride'*, William Goldman made up an author named S. Morganstern. All of the interjections and "editors notes" in the book were completely made up and meant to be a part of the reading experience.
- First person stories are often narrated in parts and author intrusion by that character is acceptable as long as the narration actually adds to the story for the reader.

Also - instructional and informative writings must have author intrusion.

While generally **author intrusion is taboo in writing fiction**, it can be a useful tool if worked in smoothly and carefully.

RECOGNIZING INTRUSIONS IN FICTION WRITING

- Consider the places where the writer hasn't sufficiently covered their tracks
- Intrusions are distracting, interrupting, and annoying.
- They express the writer's opinion(s).
- When a setting is burdened with details no one but a specialist (or an over-researched author) would know.
- If the writing is out of character for the story character - it may be author intrusion.
- When the author takes the liberty to inform the reader of details or information that is not really in line with the story, it takes away from the flow of reading and creative mind of the reader.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Words that you, the writer, would use in places where the readers should find only words the character would use.
- Knowledge that the writer rather than the character would possess - names of plants or flowers or animals or birds; names of body parts, sports trivia, history, and the workings of mechanical objects or technology; knowledge beyond what a person of the story era would logically have; knowledge beyond a character's education or station or age or experience.

IDENTIFYING IT IN YOUR WRITING...

It may be difficult for writers to see because we are used to our own opinions and knowledge. The writing needs to be evaluated as something independent of us, we must separate ourselves from our stories.

- Put it down for a while and revisit it at a later time
- Have another person read it - perhaps even out loud to you. Tell them what you are looking or listening for.

An excerpt from an internet article (Dec 2011) Authorial Intrusions
by fiction editor Beth Hill

Any time a reader can see the writer - word choice, preaching or teaching, a character who doesn't speak or act as he should, setting details that overwhelm (because the writer couldn't hold back after researching for days) - then the author has stuck a toe, a finger, a fist, or even his mind into the fiction. This intrusion distracts, draws readers away from the fiction and toward the mechanics and/or the author.

NOTE: Author intrusion is not an all-knowing narrator sharing his knowledge, knowledge that no one else in the story has. An omniscient narrator *can* know everything. But an omniscient narrator who sounds like the writer trying to teach a history lesson or preach a sermon is author intrusion.

Author intrusion is also not the skills, the special knowledge, and the personal style that a writer brings to the story to give it richness and distinction. Author intrusion only becomes a problem when those skills, knowledge, and style point outside the story and toward the writer rather than drawing readers inward to the fiction.

Your personality, your skills - your heart and hands and mind - will be all over your writing projects. Just don't let the reader see the evidence of your touch. No footsteps or fingerprints or stray hairs. Don't let readers catch you running around the corner just ahead of them. Don't let them feel you peering over their shoulders, nudging them into noticing your excellent phrasing or pity remarks.

(Sample one)

Maggie was nervous about her blind date.

Partially it was because being taken out to dinner by someone you've barely met is a nerve-racking experience in and of itself and partially because she had previously had a terrible experience involving a date who was literally blind - he'd been a nice enough person, but kept walking into things and knocking them over, and she found it very difficult to gaze meaningfully into someone's eyes when she was first having to instruct that someone on which direction to face while doing so.

When the doorbell chimed, she answered and was immediately relieved to see that her date was not carrying a white cane, and in fact his chiseled features and olive skin made him seem quite attractive.

"I'm Antony," He said and produced for her a bouquet of red roses.

"My god... you're too good for me!" Exclaimed Maggie.

And she was right. He WAS too good for her. Suddenly she looked again and he was an overweight 14 year old covered in zits.

It's annoying when a character changes the author's mind like that, but, well, you reap what you sow and all that.

Maggie looked to the sky. "Who did this? Who is controlling events in my life? First the blind guy, now this? Whoever you are, you are sick!"

Oh Maggie, you don't bite the hand that feeds, my dear. I'm just a narrator... but now you've annoyed me and look what's happened--

"OH GOD YOU TURNED HIM INTO A PIE WITH SOME GOOGLY EYES GLUED ON!"
Maggie wailed.

(Personally folks, I thought the googly eyes were a bit of fun but there was some debate amongst myself and the other voices in my head regarding this,)

But despite everything, Maggie still enjoyed her blind date with Antony, even though he was just a pie with some googly eyes glued on, and the two would have even got married had it not been for certain archaic laws preventing humans from marrying pies.

(Sample 2)

Jimmy was scheduled to meet Tiffany in front of the Duluth Harbor Museum at 3 pm.

He looked at his watch, "I wonder where she is, it's 10 after." Then turned his attention back to the lighthouse at the end of the pier.

Duluth is a delightful town with many attractions to make an eventful day. The tip of Lake Superior was like the bay of an ocean with all the sights and sounds of a harbor town. The elevation rises quickly from the bay to the northern parts of the city, making for some steep hills for businesses and homes alike. They have a train tour, an aquarium, many shops and restaurants. Perhaps Tiffany was distracted and lost track of time.

He turned his head toward the boardwalk and caught a glimpse of her back in the walking crowd. Her pace was slow and she was barely hanging on to her purse as it nearly dragged the ground. Something was wrong.