



The Half-Known World: On Writing Fiction

By Robert Boswell



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A rigorous examination of the workings of fiction by the novelist Robert Boswell, "one of America's finest writers" (Tom Perrotta)

Robert Boswell has been writing, reading, and teaching literature for more than twenty years. In this sparkling collection of essays, he brings this vast experience and a keen critical eye to bear on craft issues facing literary writers. Examples from masters such as Leo Tolstoy, Flannery O'Connor, and Alice Munro illustrate this engaging discussion of what makes great writing.

At the same time, Boswell moves readers beyond the classroom, candidly sharing the experiences that have shaped his own writing life. A chance encounter in a hotel bar leads to a fascinating glimpse into his imaginative process. And through the story of a boyhood adventure, Boswell details how important it is for writers to give themselves over to what he calls the "half-known world" of fiction, where surprise and meaning converge.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In clear, charming prose, novelist Boswell delivers a satisfying exploration of the craft of writing fiction, drawing from an array of well-chosen examples. In one instance he offers a full-bodied analysis of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* to illustrate his argument about the use of social paradigm in fiction; in a chapter on politics in the novel, he helpfully streamlines a Noam Chomsky essay into an explanatory list of the political responsibilities of the intellectual. Boswell's defense of his concept of the half-known world—the idea that there must be a dimension to the fictional reality that escapes comprehension—is spiritedly articulated and defended, and the book feels written for the serious writing student rather than the beginner. However, while addressing a sophisticated audience, he is direct—a chapter on omniscient narrators answers tough narrative questions in an easy-to-follow manner. Throughout, Boswell presents autobiographical moments and brief vignettes of his own devising to illustrate his concepts, reinforcing the fact that, like his great predecessor in craft writing John Gardner, he is a working fiction writer who knows his material. (Aug.)

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Review

“*The Half-Known World* is both brilliant and helpful to readers and fellow writers alike. This book on fiction writing avoids every form of technojargon and brings its subject matter back to where we live, to how we live, and to what we know (and can never know). It's rare for contemporary criticism to have moments of grace and beauty, but this book has many, which is what anyone might expect from a writer as accomplished and humane as Robert Boswell.” ?Charles Baxter

About the Author

Robert Boswell is the author of five novels, most recently *Century's Son*. He teaches creative writing at New Mexico State University, the University of Houston, and in the Warren Wilson MFA Program.

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