CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

'The world is better with all this beautiful work seen at last.' - A. Delf, author

This week from Clarendon House



THE INNER CIRCLE WRITERS' MAGAZINE!

In this issue, the **Great Clarendon House Poetry Challenge** gets underway! You can read the first entries beginning on page 12 - and then your task is to decide which FIVE of them go through to the second, dreaded Technical Round! It's all part of the exciting build-up to someone winning a book contract with Clarendon House in a few months' time!

PLUS

Our very special **Master Author Showcase** features the first part of **Charles Dickens'** tale *A Christmas Carol* on page 102, concluding in our Christmas issue next month - don't miss that!



Welcome!

Christmas draws nigh! And it's time for another issue of THE INNER CIRCLE WRITERS' MAGAZINE! Apart from everything listed on the left, inside this issue is the fascinating and dramatic tale of **W. B. Yeats** and **Maud Gonne**, a story which shaped Irish literature - plus **Classic Masterpieces** featuring the penultimate chapter of *The Railway Children* by **E. E. Nesbit!** In our continuing series **Fictivity**, we explore the ideal relationship with an editor, and the final chapter of **7 Secrets of Successful Stories** begins on page 86! And a quiz, submission opportunities and much more!

Stay tuned for further updates!

Feedback is welcome. Drop me a line at grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Below is a popular blog item.



Similarity and Difference: The Magic Rhythm

Similarity, difference; difference, similarity. These are the two elements which make up the magic rhythm which controls human attention and largely makes up the fundamentals of how society and aesthetics operate. But how exactly does it work?

The word ‘similarity’ is defined by the dictionary as meaning ‘having a resemblance in appearance, character, or quantity, without being identical’ and it comes from the medieval Latin *similaris*, from Latin *similis* ‘like’; the word ‘difference’ means ‘that which makes something or someone dissimilar’ and derives from the Latin *differre*, from *dis-* ‘from, away’ + *ferre* ‘bring, carry’. I’m labouring this point because the principles of similarity and difference are so interwoven into the way human beings think that it might take a little while to prise them far enough away so that we can clearly understand how to use them in storytelling and in marketing.

Think of it like this: you walk into bookstore to browse through some books. You are attracted to the shelves that contain those books that you already know you are predisposed to like, based on your past experiences. This looks at first glance as though it is ‘similarity’ at work. But in fact it is vacuums operating invisibly which are pulling you over to those shelves. What is at work, subtly, is ‘difference’. How?

Because it's your desire to find something a little different within the framework of something similar which creates a gap, a hole, a potential — and that potential, that vacuum, is the thing which effectively 'pulls' you toward those shelves. If you entered a shop containing only books which you had read a dozen times before and had no desire to read again, this 'pull' wouldn't occur; you'd walk right past. It's your desire which creates the vacuum, and the vacuum which motivates action.

Desire creates emptiness; emptiness moves us.

What does this have to do with storytelling and marketing?

Everything.

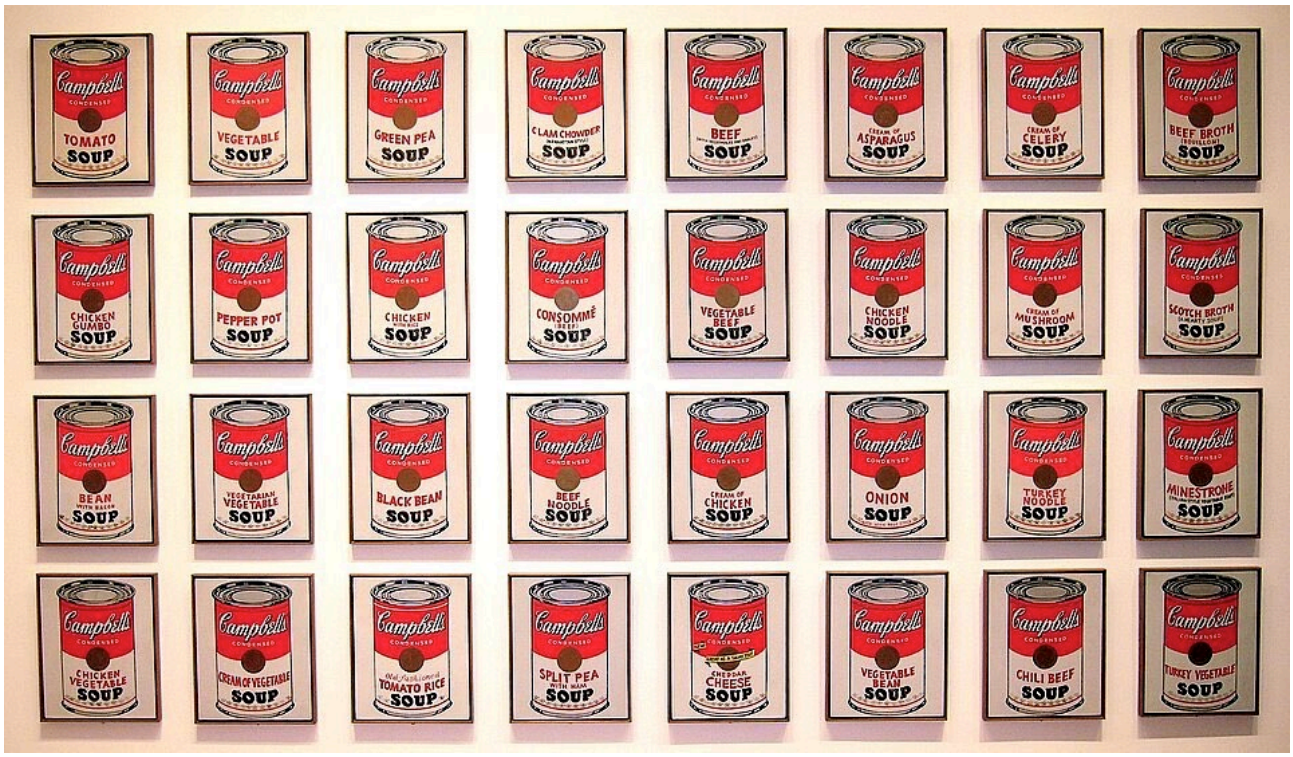
If you write a story which is exactly the same as another story, not only will it be dull but you might get into trouble for plagiarism. But let's say you write a story which strongly resembles another while containing striking differences: bang, you have created a vacuum. That vacuum draws in reader attention.

Star Wars is an obvious example. George Lucas took a dozen tropes normally associated with fantasy literature — an old wizard, a young 'chosen one', glamorous weapons, a quest and a shadowy antagonist who was connected to the hero in some way, for example — and set the whole thing a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. *The Lord of the Rings* in space. Instant vacuum. Because he did it well, and it was done at a time in the society when the whole thing filled another kind of vacuum, a cultural phenomenon was created which is thriving still today.

Star Wars is obvious — but this kind of thing is happening all around us in many ways.

A human being's attention rests comfortably upon that which is similar to things that it already largely recognises — but it is motivated into alertness and action when there is something not quite the same about that familiar background. It's how we think. Consider your own behaviour (always a good test for these assertions): you are progressing along a street down which you have walked a hundred times before, and the background is so familiar to you that to some degree it is 'zoned out' — then you notice a strange vehicle, or some new construction work, or a person you don't normally see on that street, or any one of a thousand different details. The very fact that you notice the oddity expresses my point: your attention is drawn to something different, something that doesn't 'fit'.





If you write stories which seem superficially familiar to readers but play upon marked or subtle differences, you have a better chance of success as a writer than someone who tries to write something completely original and unlike anything else that has ever been written before. Try it. Even those works which seem totally original at first can be deconstructed to show that they are resting upon fundamental similarities with other works.

But the real power of similarity and difference comes into play in marketing.

There's a term in modern marketing: 'pattern interrupt'. The basic idea is that your potential customer is moving along in some kind of sequence of thought or action, and your job, in order to be an effective marketer, is to interrupt that pattern and grab attention. It's not quite totally workable and is based on a misunderstanding, or an incomplete understanding, of what is actually happening. It's also responsible for a huge amount of irritation and disaffection amongst potential customers, if truth be told — those 'pop up' boxes and unwanted messages that appear as you scroll down a newsfeed are more likely to put people off by interrupting their patterns than they are likely to entice people to read further or act.

The principle upon which 'pattern interrupt' works is more subtle and intelligent than many marketers think. The pattern in which a potential customer is engaged is what we could call a similarity. Going back to the bookshop and you strolling into it, you will probably agree that the visible pattern there is you, browsing normally amongst some books. What exactly is it that 'interrupts' this pattern? A difference. You spot something on the shelves, something which contains a vacuum. Your desire to find something a little different has alerted you to whatever it is that suddenly stands out for you — perhaps a cover image, a book title, a blurb. Someone has created something similar enough to those things with which you are familiar to be placed right in the middle of such things — but then managed to conjure some kind of difference which captures your attention. It is the difference which attracts you — but it only works against a background of similarities.

Art works this way: take an item, image, idea or single element and place it in a context which creates a vacuum. No good placing a Campbell's soup can in a grocery store along with every other Campbell's soup can in the place where such cans are expected to be — but paint such a can in garish colours and display it on a canvas and suddenly you have attracted attention.

Take a portrait of a brunette against a pastoral background and place it with thousands of other such images and no one will notice it; give that same brunette a slight, enigmatic smile and paint it very well, and you have the Mona Lisa.

Take a story of a young orphan struggling to survive on the streets of Victorian London and make it closely resemble dozens of other overly sentimental stories told at that time and the tale rapidly disappears into a background saturated with similarity — tell the same story with outrageously memorable characters speaking a language which is electrically alive with humour and wisdom, and you have a Dickensian classic.

Take a sword and sorcery tale featuring wizards and goblins and set it in an imaginary world and you're likely to lose it against the backdrop of a thousand other stories; add some incisive wit and humorous observations about modern life and the human condition and you have a Terry Pratchett.

There are a million other examples. That's because every successful story that has ever been written has blended similarity and difference together in this way. The dull stories, the ones you don't remember and don't see on the shelves are the ones which were too similar to others; the incomprehensible or wild stories which you will never see because they also don't make it onto the shelves are the ones which were too different to be able to relate to readers.

Similarity, difference; difference, similarity. It's a rhythm. It applies to plots, to characters, to cover designs, to blurbs. It applies to everything. The reason you're still reading this is because you have read similar articles in the past and gained something — though you hope that this one is a little different and you'll learn something you didn't know before.

Isn't it?

For more, get How Stories Really Work -and my course, Become a Professional Author.

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*'I'm reading through **How Stories Really Work**. I've studied writing books for years but I've never seen anything like this! This book is REVOLUTIONARY. Everything is made so simple and precise that other methods of writing seem clumsy by comparison. It's not just a way of writing, but a way of seeing.'*

-A. P. (Author)

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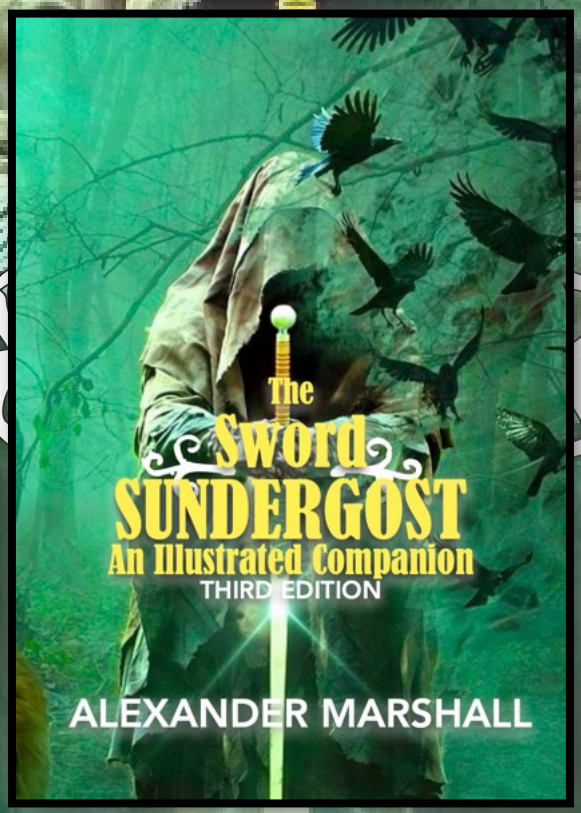
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GARETH MACREADY



THE BONES OF MY UNIVERSE



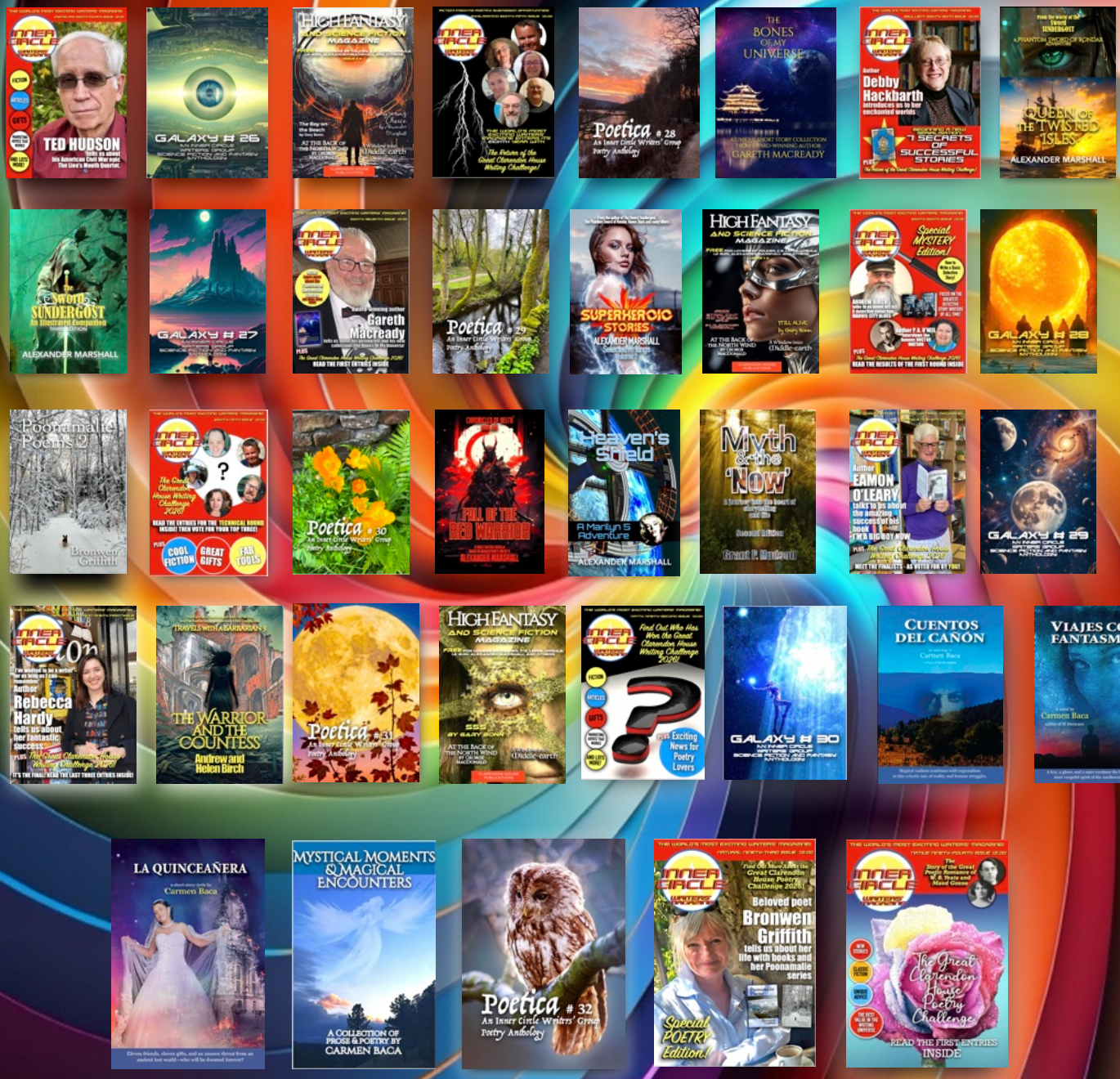
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Gareth Macready lived in Japan, working as a variety act, and built a small studio theatre there. He received the Key to the City from Osaka City Council and collaborated with Japan's biggest comedy company, advising the council on the city's inaugural PerformaFest. Ten of his short stories have been published in Galaxy anthologies. One of his short stories received an Honourable Mention from The LRH Writers of the Future Competition. His short film script, Frank Sees Grandpa, won the Best Screenplay Short at the Ardélion Awards Gala 2025.

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2026 so far!



Stay tuned for much more in 2026!

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Over seven years ago, I launched Clarendon House Publications from my home here on the edge of the Yorkshire Moors in England.

Since then, I have published almost **300** high quality items - books, magazines, course modules - and helped hundreds of authors and poets achieve publication, some for the first time.

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Here's to many more publications and many more years helping you achieve your dreams!

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