



The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot

By Charles Baxter

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Charles Baxter inaugurates *The Art of*, a new series on the craft of writing, with the wit and intelligence he brought to his celebrated book *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*.

Fiction writer and essayist Charles Baxter's *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot* discusses and illustrates the hidden subtextual overtones and undertones in fictional works haunted by the unspoken, the suppressed, and the secreted. Using an array of examples from Melville and Dostoyevsky to contemporary writers Paula Fox, Edward P. Jones, and Lorrie Moore, Baxter explains how fiction writers create those visible and invisible details, how what is displayed evokes what is not displayed.

The Art of Subtext is part of *The Art of* series, a new line of books by important authors on the craft of writing, edited by Charles Baxter. Each book examines a singular, but often assumed or neglected, issue facing the contemporary writer of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. *The Art of* series means to restore the art of criticism while illuminating the art of writing.

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The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot By Charles Baxter Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #186733 in Books
- Brand: Baxter, Charles
- Published on: 2007-07-24
- Released on: 2007-07-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.04" h x .2" w x 5.00" l, .42 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 120 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Though there are passages where this slim, college-lecture-style volume turns facile or tiresome, novelist Baxter's analysis of "the implied, the half-visible, and the unspoken" in literature is saved from irrelevance by a keen sense of pacing and a healthy dose of self-awareness (after confidently zooming through seminal works by Herman Melville, John Cheever, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Baxter confesses, "I feel that ... I am on the verge of what Walt Whitman calls 'a usual mistake.' I don't wish to simplify what is actually intricate"). Indeed, as the brief chapters of this little book build on each other, Baxter's observations-which initially seem more like interesting rhetorical devices than substantive arguments-gain clarity and momentum, and the accumulation of anecdotal asides about writers' workshops and former students turn them from annoying interjections into helpful indicators of Baxter's relationship with literature. Many of the issues raised in this volume are as old as the study of literature itself, but Baxter's ability to ask unusual and incisive questions of familiar topics (Why is the volatility of Dostoyevsky's characters so unpleasant? Why is it so difficult-and yet so vital-to describe facial features?) makes this little volume worthwhile for the engaged student of literature.

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Review

"Baxter is smart about all aspects of craft." *?The Corresponder*

"A wonderful new volume about writing that's also about reading and the ways we make meaning in our lives." *?The Observer*

About the Author

CHARLES BAXTER is the author of ten books, including *The Feast of Love*, a finalist for the National Book Award, and *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*. He teaches at the University of Minnesota and lives in Minneapolis.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Keisha Kent:

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