


Experimental fiction: Writing that breaks normal conventions of storytelling with unusual characters, structure, or timeline, among other possibilities.

Razor's Edge

Rough, damp leather completely covers my head. Sounds outside scratch and claw through the darkness that envelops the world as far as I can see, beckoning me to join them, but I do not want to. My arms are outstretched, to my sides as they always are, preventing the rest of my body from joining my head in this animal-hide prison; I try to put them down but am never successful. What century am I in? Have I lived through another one without knowing again? Time rarely seems to pass from in here; I try to count the seconds, but I always give up when I reach a number in the millions and feel the uselessness of my actions weigh down on me. A million crashing footsteps sounding off in unison are joined by the distant sounds of vultures ready for the feast of a lifetime. The two sounds join and harmonize with one another in an unknowing but obvious bond while a third breaks in and out of existence, signaling a climax for both.


Although I don't see others, I know there are many around me, others with their heads bound in tanned flesh, eager to taste the world that awaits them outside. Not me; I am bound with them, but I am not bound like them. They thirst for what the harmonies foretell, while I cower in the prison where I am kept, but not against my will; I simply want to rest. The steps reach their crescendo and then cease to exist, leaving the sounds of the vultures to fade into obscurity once again. My heart, if I had one, would be beating dangerously fast as I imagine what the next few seconds will hold. The time ahead of me expands into segments like a three-act play in which I am no more than a supporting actor, but no less important because of it. The scene has been set



without me and I have been brought, like a puppet, to play my part. Alarum: the signal for me to enter my stage.

I am ripped from the leather with abandon, and the outside world hits me all at once; a rain pours down on my entire body, and the reflections of armor-clad warriors gleam off my head. I am thrust through the heart of a man, his gore and fluids being released from every entrance I create as he is run through in the blink of an eye, his life being released right in front of me; he is one of so many that will be cut down on this horrendous day. A tool of peace and violence and honor and death, every word describing who I am but not who I want to be as I cut through flesh and bone and sinew, staining the wet, broken ground a darker crimson than any on this field has seen or will ever see again in their lives that are destined to be short and pointless. I am not pointless in any regard; I am what drives every man on this battlefield and what will drive through many of them, but I never wanted to kill, to take the life out of a living being without remorse of any kind, putting an instant stop to a string of generations that stretch back to the beginning of time.

The corpses that litter the ground seem more plentiful than the raindrops slicing through the star-laden sky, but my mind races back and forth on the morality of what I am being forced to do as I tear limb from torso; I am a harbinger of eternal damnation, but I am a pacifist, never wanting to injure a living being for as long as I exist. Rushing wind and screams and calls for mercy pierce the air as I pierce a chest, the constant guilt and horror I face every time I leave my leather cell returning to me in full force and I want to scream, but I cannot; the howls of my disgust and torture ring only through my own thoughts as I attempt to block out the war and death that completely surrounds me. The final cry of pain from a warrior is indistinguishable from the sobs of their few children and widowed wives and indistinguishable from the funeral



music that plays at an empty grave back home, their body either too disfigured to be recognized or too buried under others to be recovered.

Movement stops, and the ground kisses my face.

The action that enveloped me, that I attempted to block, is halted.

On the ground next to me, the decapitated head of he who wielded me retains a face of anger from his final moments alive.

My time as an instrument of war is over. Finally over.

Calm sweeps over me as I look to my future and know that I will be buried here in time, never to be used again.

My mind is at ease, for the first time ever.

I can be the pacifist I wanted to be. I can be at peace.

The rivers of blood flow past me on this broken battlefield, and I feel them wash over me.

It is not warm, as I am used to, but cold from the chilled rain. A difference that makes it clear how different the world will be for me now.

I kiss the ground tenderly as it kissed my face, as I realize the intimate relationship I will have with it for the rest of eternity.

My time of war is over.

And now I can rest.