

Approaches to Creativity : The Story

Short Stories, nanofiction, smoke long stories, skinlits/ flash fiction/prose poetry

It is no surprise that we associate stories often with children. It is part of the child's preparation for adult life.

*And that we connect stories to bed time telling , as if the state between sleep and being awake is blurred anyway.

* And that our imaginations are able to carry us, transport us to another place, another time, another realm

*Stories are after all meant to be told- tale, from the Anglo –Saxon –*tal*u—speech and in a historical sense –storytelling is one of the oldest of all arts.

* Entertainment was a cultural necessity a kind of life-lone and the storytellers breathed life into human cultures.

* Stories are sometimes shadows. Ivan the Terrible required three blind men to tell him stories before he slept.

* Stories contain a sense of wonder,

* tales of transformations,

*Jocular tales

* Cautionary tales

* Ghost stories

* Stories of heroes, people, places, events.

Tales according to Roger Abrahams – are in the ears of their hearers—permissible lies.

Italo Calvino states:

That the folktale tends to absorb something of the place where it is narrated: landscape, customs, moral outlook,

- Homer, Aesop,

Storytelling is a personal art with a public/community purpose. It makes public what is private and makes private what is public.

Whether shamans, or visionaries, poets (Irish poet tellers studied their art for 15years and had to be wise in astronomy , philosophy – 25- prime tales.

Greek storytellers learnt to perform the kithara.

Navajo recited as did many a tribe/nation – creation stories.

In Wales, the Mabinogion is told and retold all the time in a new way. Norse myths also and the sagas of Iceland (retold through poetry too by Gerdur Kristny).

Medieval troubadours also went around telling tales around the countryside.

Today, our modern version of storytellers can be seen in comedians – the stand-up comic is the closest we come to storytelling in our culture, along with poets who perform their work e.g Paul Durcan.

Today's storytellers.

Whenever we tell a story we continue the process of creation. We chose words, select the narrative arc, we add to it- what my grandfather would call 'rhoi blodau ' ar story- putting flowers on a story , that is embellishing it so as to make it better.

We are always trying to make out stories better. More interesting, exciting, more meaningful, more urgent.

'Stories is the spinning wheel on which continuity is spliced, source of our sense of self. Narrative's yarn is also the substance with which a culture addresses its questions: religion and science each sleep in a cradle woven and hung upon stories. By its place in the pattern we learn which information is the more significant, which less; though anything mentioned has meaning—as it must, in a universe in which each thing is tied to everything else. Any individual construct may be suspect, but without story, we cannot live as humans do.' (Jane Hirshfield- Nine Gales)

Stories alter as culture too changes. So that we are always writing within a culture – 'old myths shaps-shift, new ones come forth'.

From story telling to stories written (not every culture has written stories

e.g Tunisia—few books, few people who read – Arabic Tunisian very different from Arabic)

Storytelling /Odyssey and the Iliad – all have the three components of good writing:

- Sense of narrative – it's going somewhere
- Sense of lyricism
- Sense of drama.

The 6 word story

Ernest Hemingway once made a wager that he could complete a story in only six words.

For sale: baby shoes, never worn’.

This won him \$10 back in the 1920s but sparked a phenomenon in 2006.

Hemingway understood the story form. His writing style capturing the imagination.

Very short stories is downloadable Josh Webb – Very short stories by Josh Webb(Book) in Arts and Photography.

So let’s try our hand at making quickly six word stories. Here are some examples:

Born bald. Grew hair. Bald again.

Life gives scraps. I make quilts.

Longed for him. Got him. Shit (Margaret Atwood).

‘Will this do?’ (Lazy writer asked)’. (Wired magazine, 2006)

Italo Calvino (he called his stories *raccontini*) believed in the one word sentence but could not better the one written by the Italian novelist Augusto Monteroso ‘When he woke up, the dinosaur was still there’.

Umberto Eco in his book ‘Six walks’ talks about writing stories and makes the distinction between

The king died. Then the queen died . (here there is no story)

But ‘ The king died. Then the queen died of grief (or broken heart) That is a story.

2 Nano fiction: micro fiction/flash fiction.

‘The average micro fiction will be less than 400 words, if the novel writer is a carpenter who structures a whole house, and a short story writer is the decorator of one of its rooms, then the micro fiction writer is the mailman who looks into the box before dropping in the household letters. Readers discover something brief and intimate in a very short space.

Dan Rhodes: Anthropology contains 101 word each -- breaking the code of the 100 word short story (called drabble).

The term comes from Monty Python's 1971 *Big Red Book* in which drabble was a word game where the first participant to write a novel wins.

3 The brevity of writing short stories is akin to a prose poem. In Robert Hass's prose poem we have the perfect example of knowledge –holding, of the tale being more than the sum of its parts.

Read: A Story about a Body (see handout)

4 So why do we love short stories so much?

Jonathan Franzen in his introduction to Alice Munro's collection of short stories - Runaway says:

- i. We like stories because they leave the writer with no place to hide**
- ii. No yakking your way out of trouble--- if you've got nothing to say- I'm going to know it**
- iii. I like stories because they are usually set in the present or in living memory; the genre seems to resist the historical impulse that makes so many contemporary novels feel fugitive and cadaverous.**
- iv. I like stories because it takes the best kind of talent to invent fresh characters and situations**
- v. Complexity of things/things within things**
- vi. Genius for unpacking moments of epiphany**

Carol Shields believed her stories to be ' tap dancing'- whereas novel writing was more ballroom or dancing with feet on the floor.

Grace Paley sometimes said of her short stories—if only I could give them one more day – one more day to change their destiny.

But there are no rules to writing short stories. Try to create rules and there will be some wonderful story that has broken its rules.

Are all short stories – stories? A lot of contemporary stories seem free of narrative.

It's 'temperament' ? Picasso said

Art is a lie that helps us realise the truth’.

Ways of helping you make a story. Look in newspapers,

Take a sentence from a book and like Miro – take the line for a walk

Choose a postcard with an interesting person in its middle in a place. Create a scenario.