My Stories Part 8

An Essay

By Maryanne Peters

I have not published an essay for ages because I detect that they are not so well-received. But what prompts me to write a few words this week is some general debate of other platforms, about inspiration, and lazy writing, and the very nature of the short story.

I consider myself a short story writer, but not because I set out to be one. I just find that the stories I tell are not long. They are glimpses of life – maybe one, two or three glimpses per story. The challenge in a shorter story, is to develop plot and characters within those glimpses. I do not feel that it is necessary to draw all the threads together at the end. I have said before, I like short stories that end with a question-mark.

I also have made the point to others, a short story need not have a beginning, a middle and an end. It may start somewhere other than the beginning, and end before the end, or it may just be the end of a larger story.

And then there are stories that are really just the beginnings. For many of these I am told that I should write more, and sometimes I do, but no novel (yet).

I feel that for a novel, or anything between a short story and a novel, requires a deliberate design, and that is not how I write.

I like short stories. I like reading them. A short story is defined by it being able to be read in a single sitting – most often between 2,000 and 4,000 words. I understand that it takes about 15 minutes to read 4,000 words without rushing, and I generally try to keep my story under that. Anything over 5,000 words I call a novelette, and some of these I have posted on Amazon Kindle Direct (<https://www.amazon.com/author/maryannepeters>). A few months ago I published a new one there which is much shorter.

Many people have suggested that I should write longer stories. Somebody even suggested that I could “pad them out with dialog or descriptions”. You know the thing: “The sun shone brightly, with a dew drop on the rose bush catching the rays as if it were a diamond. He turned towards her, his rough face flushed almost the color of the red handkerchief in the pocket of his green tweed jacket. ‘Am I boring you,’ he asked, sheepishly”.

It is not me. I hope that other authors will forgive me if I say that in my view, verbiage is not desirable. My discipline in writing for my work (reports, analysis, information memoranda) has always encouraged me to take the time to distil something into its essence. Like Blaise Pascal who apologized for the long letter “because I did not have the time to write a shorter one”.

Sometimes I think long stories can be lazier than short – like typing out a pointless conversation. Some are very long and seemingly have grown “like Topsy” (I wonder if that term might now deemed racist or culturally offensive). I don’t wish to sound too conceited, because many very long stories have a huge and adoring audience. Somebody told me that a story told in chapters will acquire fans along the way and can build a large readership by number who avidly await the next instalment.

I value readership. I want to be read. Short stories are not to everybody’s taste, I admit.

The advantage of a short story is that it must be new. You cannot take the same characters and basic premise and just put them somewhere else and have them talk. At the same time the disadvantage for the writer is finding something new. I am always casting about for that.

Recently in my hunt for ideas my identification of inspirations has led me to be accused of stealing, something which I find very upsetting. It has been said that in art, nothing is truly novel, but I do not believe that. But when I started, I thought that there might be a dozen TG themes that I could explore … now, only a few years but hundreds of stories later, I am not so sure.

As usual, comments and suggestions on anything that I write are still requested.

With love to all my patrons,

Maryanne