

Seventy-Third

8/15/24

I have written 72 short stories. They're all about me because, as you said, I'm a narcissist.

Four of my stories include the Salish Sea to honor our salt water. One has a dog. Two are about retribution unless you're perceptive in which case 72 of my stories include a gentle retribution. My published work amounts to Zero.

I abhor retribution.

Writing short fiction is not difficult. All you do is sharpen a pen to its piercing point and push it into your chest. Keep pushing and still push more. Let ink meld. Then safely lean over to exude onto the unfortunate page. If your blood soaks through to other pages, it may be worthy of rewrites. I don't write masterworks, only goodenoughformeworks.

Though I sometimes wish to extract myself, I'm not good enough to imagine ulterior motivations and character backgrounds, of diverse settings. I'm fine with, "The big time is where I'm at."

All my settings take place where I live, planet Earth. And not even all Earth, just my neighborhood and not even all that. Nearly all my stories take place in my cold apartment, in the TV room of dark apartment. I'm not good enough to write about other planets or genders or other's apartments.

It's all I can do to write about me. I resent waisting pages of blood.

If I could, all my characters would, in the very first paragraph, disintegrate into Puget Sound but that leaves little leeway for story's progress. It's also unbelievable and believability is paramount to every story, I'm told. If I believe my story, I believe you'll believe it too.

In 17 of my stories, the protagonist weeps which is not very believable. The antagonist weeps in 66 stories which is far less believable. Sometimes they weep together. Sometimes with arms wrapped around one another, good and grieving hugging themselves in the sappy slop of apology and grief, in their deep need for the retribution of repentance. Weeping seems to be a common occurrence in my pages of blood.

No character ever weeps from physical pain. That's a rule.

Another rule is this: Every protagonist should have some sort of halo, either real or metaphysical, like a shining lightbulb or a yellow sequin star pillow taped behind their head to catch their brain or, best of all, their shiny swimmer's hair flashed in the slant of stained glass sunlight.

This is not so much rule as goal: Every antagonist should be victorious. That's going to make your creative writing professor irate, but -like your significant other- a creative writing professor is only helpful when irate. As long as you patiently listen and note. Then apologize with this, "Ah yes. I see now what you mean. Thank you."

Alcohol is often involved. I'll say that here and we'll leave it there. Alcohol infused narcissism often propels my stories.

Another rule is this: People should always try to get along, even if one has bound and gagged the other inside a burning hut of TNT. In 70 stories someone is either bound or gagged but they are always ingratiating. I write the world I want to see.

Here's something: if a character asks their child who Former now pleases, that character is gagged. If another character wants to go and visit Former because he's desperately lonely for your affirming arms to cocoon my whole being and to be your 'best friend in the whole wide world for ever and ever' again, that character is bound. Stories can be pathetically simple when Main Character is both bound and gagged. I've lost track how many times I do that.

Simple is not good for short fiction. To maintain interest, I try to fill my stories with tension, with grief, with complication. Sometimes complications become too complicated, too personal, too bloody much grieving on paper and are rejected by all the publishers in the English reading world at which point that story must be chucked and rewritten.

Seventy-two of my stories have been chucked. I've rewritten them all into this one.