

Writing the Limits

By Sean Leung Lerche

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A good example of how effective the use of repetition can be in telling a story. We like this and we also like the element of mystery that sneaks up on you. Who is the author writing to and who, exactly, is being addressed? And given that this is a story about writing, there isn't a writer out there who can't relate to it. Prose is on the polite side of colloquial and fresh with tonal colourations.*

Quote: Can you hear me? Can you see me? I want to see the trees bearing loquats again. I want to hear the cawing of crows and the screeching tires of speeding cars. I want to smell the air and the damp soil. Write of me. Scribble my name. Write and recognize me.

(Font size is author's own.)

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1,000. The word limit. Keep it in mind. Remember the word count. Scribble it down, then erase it away. Remind yourself, and then forget about its importance. Tell yourself to remain within this limit, and then ask why you're doing so in the first place. Ask why. Then tell yourself that you have to.

Scribble away. Write. Or at least, write what you think counts as writing. Write, and then forget what you're writing to begin with. Imagine, and then forget that you can imagine anything at all. Scribble away. Just don't forget why you wanted to write to begin with.

1,000. That's the word limit. Do you remember it? 'Course you don't. There's no reason for you to try to, not when it's already etching itself into you.

1,000. That's your limit. Do you remember it? No? Then I'll force you to. I'll etch it into your arm. I'll etch it into your fingers. I'll etch it all across your back and scratch it in so deeply that you'll never be able to forget about it again. You'll remember it then, won't you?

Oh! Oh whoops! It seems I etched it in a little too deeply. It's cutting in a bit far now, isn't it? Sorry about that. But you can't really blame me, can you? I mean, I didn't think that you were alive to begin with. No one did! No one except for you.

This wasn't my work, mind you. I'm not the one that tried to hurt you. I'm not the first to cut into you so deeply. I only exist because of those cuts of yours. Too bad I can't heal them like you wanted.

Scribble. Write your thoughts. Describe those fervent emotions, why don't you? I know you can do it. All you have to do is remain within the word limit. That's all. 1,000 words. You remember, right? No? Should I etch it in deeper? You should know, the cuts won't heal this time. I won't be able to help you. You already forgot about me, and the wounds are only getting worse. You can't write of me anymore, not when the only thing you want is for me to help you.

You're actually looking up now. Can you see me? I can do something about that, if you like. I can cut out your eyes if you want. I can drive the cuts even deeper, if you want. Look! You can see them! The pages. They're ripping themselves out now. They're folding, and shredding, and sharpening themselves, all so that they may cut that much deeper into you. The words you've written down for your own consumption are beginning to turn on you. You can still read them. You can still understand what they're saying, but you can't connect to them anymore. They mean nothing to you anymore. You've written them down only to forget that they ever existed to begin with.

Do they still matter to you? Do these words still hold meaning for you? Can you still recognize me? No? Good. You have no reason to remember me anymore.

Scribble away. Write once more. Try desperately to capture me again, even when you can no longer understand me. Hear me. See me. Write of me. Write of how I look. Write of how I sound. Write the story of my life itself. Create me. Make me, so that I may recognize you.

1,000 words. That's your limit. Do you remember? Would you like to remember? No? Then what would you like to remember? You can't write of me anymore. I no longer exist in your mind. I exist before you. I live and breathe before you. I cut into you so that I may affirm you. I rip into you so that I may feel you. I tear through you so that I may recognize you. These are my words. These are my pages. This is my will. Will you recognize it now? Will you recognize me now that you've written me?

1,000 words. That's your limit. You've breached 700 now. You've noticed that, right? Have you finished writing about me yet? I wish you would already. I want to be here. I want to exist. I want to live again. I want to love. I want to hate. I want to cry. I want to live! Just give me that chance!

Write. Can you hear me? Can you see me? We were like this once before. You wrote of me so that I could exist. You wrote of me because you wanted me to live. You wrote of me because you wanted to recognize me. You wrote because you wanted to write.

Can you hear me? Can you see me? I want to see the trees bearing loquats again. I want to hear the cawing of crows and the screeching tires of speeding cars. I want to smell the air and the damp soil. Write of me. Scribble my name. Write and recognize me.

You've reached over 800 words now. Almost reached your limit now. You alright? You know, I saw you cry once when you were writing. You used to have so much emotion in you. You used to have such passion in you that it practically burst out of you every time you chose to write of me. It was you who decided to give me an incredible life to live. It was you who filled it with the beauties and horrors of being a character of your creation.

923. 924. 925. I guess we're just about out of words now. Don't worry about it. Don't think about it. Do me a favor instead. Don't stop writing. I don't want you to stop, even when you finally leave me behind.

1,000 words. Did you forget about it? It's fine. It never mattered to begin with. Just write. Scribble away. Etch my name into the paper. I want to recognize you.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I have to admit that I myself tend to still be surprised by my pursuit and study of writing. Looking back, the people that I am able to cite as having inspired me are the various incredible teachers that I had the pleasure to meet. In the midst of my worst times, they were able to convince me that my passion for writing was worth pursuing.*

My time as a writer has shown me that I myself have to temper my passion at times to improve my own writing. That includes having to face some of the more egregious limits that myriad writers have had to consider, one such being the word

limit. Mind the reader, I've always resented the 1,000 word limit that tends to be placed on a writer vying for a submission.

I suppose I just wrote this piece as a mildly self-deprecating exploration of the contradictions playing themselves out in my own head, between the tempering that I employ to remain within the word limit and the desire to write storylines that span multiple pages. And in truth, I think a few of my characters have reflected that perception I have of my writing. All the same, I hope my piece is able to provide some solace to other writers; the effort is worth it when pursuing one's passion.

AUTHOR'S BIO: My name is Sean Leung Lerche, and I am an aspiring writer studying Creative Writing at Sonoma State University. I have previously published my work with school magazines 'Forum' and 'The Writing Success Project Anthology'. If you wish to see further examples of my writing you can do so by visiting my blog 'Word Limits' at wordlimits.blogspot.com