

The Art of Brevity: Crafting the Very Short Story

Grant Faulkner

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Grant Faulkner's *The Art of Brevity* is a masterful flash fiction guidebook that shows how powerful a few words can be.

Guiding those who write pieces ranging from 100 words to two pages of text, this book celebrates short, accessible prose. It's composed of a series of brief lessons that encourage writers to wrestle with fitting a plot into a hundred words or capturing a specific moment in time. And it also aims insights at critics who see flash fiction as being a sign of the digital-obsessed times, claiming instead that the flash fiction genre is in a "paradoxical position"—both marginalized and popular. Further, Faulkner notes that flash fiction in fact has long roots; he points to masters of the form as proof, including Italo Calvino and Grace Paley.

Here, short-short stories are compared to bonsai trees, in need of pruning and allegiance to form. With pithy advice such as "if you write small, don't worry about writing big," the book argues that every element of a novel can be contained in a handful of words, including plots, characterizations, and sensuality. As proof, it includes examples of successful flash fiction pieces (like Jacqueline Doyle's "Little Darling," about a teenager's affair with her soccer coach) that reveal how much is possible via allusions and absent details. These stories further illuminate the book's claims about how a story's form can successfully break with conventions, resulting in unexpected narrative arcs.

Brevity is an inspiring creative writing guidebook for those looking to expand their repertoires and hone new flash fiction skills.

JEREMIAH ROOD (March / April 2023)

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