



Innovation can be regarded as work that 'breaks the rules', the result sometimes becoming a new rule or, in poetry or fiction, a new genre.

In poetry the record for brevity is a poem written by literary history's most prolific poet, a poem called 'Microbes' by Anon. It appears below:

Adam
Had 'em.

In fiction there is a category for very short stories called 'Flash Fiction' (or microfiction, micro-story, postcard fiction, prose and short story), pieces of no more than 300 words or, according to another definition, 1,000 words. Short stories longer than that are called 'Sudden Fiction' (see Wikipedia on 'Flash Fiction').

According to one account, a teacher once told a class of creative writing students the four secrets of the short story:

- It must have God in it or at least some sense of divine presence or externally ordained order in the world.
- It must contain suspense, to keep the reader interested, reading page after page, right to the very end of the book.
- And, in this modern world, there must be sex in it, alas.
- Finally, being the short story, brevity is of the essence.

The next day a student brought in an assignment containing what s/he excitedly claimed must be the perfect short story, one containing only eight words. It ran: 'My God, I'm pregnant. I wonder who dunnit ...'

Another story claims that in the 1920s Ernest Hemingway won a 10-dollar bet about whether or not he could write an acceptable short story in half a dozen words. His winning story was, 'For sale: baby shoes, never worn', a piece he is said to have regarded as one of his best.

According to Wikipedia, a 100-word short story is called a Drabble. Maybe a 50-word story should be called a DemiDrabble.

If so, *dotdotdash* received 90 would-be DemiDrabbles. They were 'would-be' in the sense that not all of them conformed to the 50-word limit – that was a pity in the sense that one or two of the entries excluded for being over or under the prescribed length might well have been one of the finalists. One lesson competitors should keep in mind is that the rules favour the entries that conform to them. Another lesson about DemiDrabbles is that what is not said can be skilfully implied, as in the two stories cited above.

To the right is the winning story, followed by five highly commended entries, all of them demonstrating an awareness of those two points.

DemiDrabbleDibbles: The Brian Dibble Shortest Story Competition

Winner:

How She Lost Her Passion for Russian Vodka, Stopped Going to the Gym and Put on a Noticeable Amount of Weight; Being a Brief but Thorough Retelling of Kate's Story, Including Her Early Morning Cravings for Buffalo Wings and How She Rediscovered Her Love of Lego.

'Push,' cried the nurse.

-Michael Burrows

Commended entries:

Worry

What if by shaking her hand I contract some skin-to-skin spread infection that infests my system and causes my flesh and organs to putrefy until the natural acids and bile spill from my gall bladder and I slowly eat myself from the inside out? Or she doesn't like me?

-Jason McNamara

Clothesline

Now, seven years on, when the bore has stained the fence red, when the bindii cover the ground like a carpet of brown teeth, and when the worn leather strap of her sandal rests slackly on the back of her left ankle, she stands beside the clothesline, still waiting.

-Erin Pearce

Light and Shadow

West wind blowing tubes of glassy green water. The surfer lying in dawning light, prone against the swelling breast of ocean.

The sea breathes in slowly rolling rises and falls. He is child to mother. Lover to mistress. Oblivious. Rapt. As the shadow torpedoes upwards towards him.

-Heather Mackenzie

First Kiss

'Don't you know how to kiss?' the boy asked the girl.

She tried again.

'Now there's too much teeth,' he said.

She rolled her eyes but gave it another go.

'Too much tongue.'

Exasperated, she tried for a fourth time.

'See, you can kiss!' the boy said, smiling.

-Anne Salatlija