A Word from Our Sponsor

www.sistersincrimemiddletennessee.org
The Short of It: Writing Killer Short Fiction
What’s in Common?

- 3:10 to Yuma
- A Christmas Carol
- The Birds
- Children of the Corn
- The Fall of the House of Usher
- Heart of Darkness
- The Living Daylights
- The Nutcracker
- The Secret Life of Walter Mitty
- The Third Man

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
“The short story is still like the novel’s wayward younger brother. We know that it’s not respectable... but I think that can also add to the glory of it.”

--Neil Gaiman
What personal or professional glory do you seek?

THERE ARE NO WRONG ANSWERS.
WHAT’S YOUR HONEST ONE?

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Personal Glory

2016

Agatha:
The Last Blue Glass by B.K. Stevens (4/16)

Anthony:
The Last Blue Glass by B.K. Stevens (4/16)

Derringer:
Short Story: Bek's and the Second Note by Bruce Arthurs (12/16)
Long Story: The Cumberland Package by Robert Mangeot (5/16)
Novella: The Chemistry of Heroes by Catherine Dilts (5/16)
Novella: Inquiry and Assistance by Terrie Farley Moran (1-2/16)
Novella: The Last Blue Glass by B.K. Stevens (4/16)

Shamus:
A Battlefield Reunion by Brendan DuBois (6/16)
This Session, In Short

- Form Equals Function (story basics)
- Open Sesame (those first paragraphs)
- Submission Possible (getting ready for market)

Time is short, too!
More materials are included in the presentation file.
Contact me if you would like the entire PDF.
The Short of It:
Form Equals Function
Well, if they said it...

“A good story would take me out of myself and then stuff me back in, outsized, now, and uneasy with the fit.”

--David Sedaris
When We Say Short...

- Novel: 100,000
- Novella: 40,000
- Novelette: 17,500
- Short Story: 8,000
- Flash Fiction: 1,000
- Drabble: 100

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Arts and Crafts

- Short stories are as old as caves and campfires
- Honor that craft, by understanding the basics
- Even if you then promptly ignore structural theory...
- ...Because then you’ve afforded yourself that freedom

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Thread A Story Through

WRITE THE CRITICAL THREAD

1. Framing Passage
2. Set Up
3. Character Turn
4. Big Honking Moment
5. Resonant Finish

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
EXCEPT WHATEVER YOU DO,

DO IT REALLY SHORT

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Compression of Language

- Remember the critical thread! No straying!
  - Setting, description, etc.: Do they further the whole?
  - Summon inner poet / playwright / screenwrite
- **Vivid writing does double duty**
  - Advances plot + tone + character → all at once
  - Fresh language, please (aka the elusive “Voice”)
  - Find echoes (echo... echo...echo...) to your one-ness

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Well, if *they* said it...

“A short story is a love affair, 
a novel is a marriage. 
A short story is a photograph; 
a novel is a film.”

--Lorrie Moore
Right-Size the Idea: A Study in Scarlett

**STORY**

“Scarlett and the Green Dress”

- Compressed time
- Big problem
- One thread
- Thematic shift

**NOVEL**

*Gone With the Wind*

- Unfolding time
- Mounting problems
- Sub/secondary plots
- Thematic arc

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
“Having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect… If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step.”

--Edgar Allan Poe
Unity of Effect

- What is the story’s **point**? What emotion or message is meant to resonate?

- EVERY aspect serves the whole.
  - Theme
  - Voice
  - POV
  - Main character
  - Antagonists & supporting cast
  - Central conflict
  - Open, close, & plot points

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Begin With End In Mind...

- Short stories = “Ending Delivery Systems”
- Character pushed to final making/breaking point
- Everything weaves toward **Big Honking Moment**
  - Not necessarily the last passage – but often is
  - It’s the full payoff and understanding of consequences
- You may know your B.H.M. at the get-go (faster) or find it while writing – just find it and write toward it

**Stories get read in a single sitting.**

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
### Honk if You Love Big Moments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>The Ending</th>
<th>The Big Honking Moment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Cask of Amontillado”</td>
<td>Fortunado gets bricked up and left imprisoned</td>
<td>Just before, when Fortunado knows he’s screwed, and our hero(?) has his revenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Good Man Is Hard to Find”</td>
<td>The Misfit ruminates on his crimes and the nature of humanity</td>
<td>The grandmother knows she’s going to die and begs (the Misfit) for mercy and forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Gift of the Magi”</td>
<td>A Voice of God Narrator lectures on how to gift-give wisely</td>
<td>The poor couple realize they’ve each sacrificed their own prized thing to benefit their partner’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Close Sesame: Options

- O. Henry Twist ("Gift of the Magi")
- No One Expects the Spanish Inquisition ("The Red-Headed League")
- Self-Revelation / Rebirth ("All the Good Ones Are Taken")
- Self-Destruction ("Hills Like White Elephants")
- Coming to Grips ("Debarking" and "The Wavemaker Falters")
- Inevitability of Fate ("The Lottery")
- Height of Uncertainty ("When Strangers Claim the Tarnished")
Robert Mangeot

The Short of It: Open, Sesame
Hook Them & Frame Them

- Paraphrasing Ann Patchett: “deal the cards;” frame the problem and the ending (however direct vs. foreshadowed)

- Get the B.H.M spotted & first draft(s) behind you. Then revisit opening. Let the brilliant framing emerge.

- First Person? Get to that “I”!


- Study authors and openings that sing to you
“The grandmother didn’t want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey’s mind. Bailey was the son she lived with, her only boy. He was sitting on the edge of his chair at the table, bent over the orange sports section of the Journal. “Now look here, Bailey,” she said, “see here, read this,” and she stood with one hand on her thin hip and the other rattling the newspaper at his bald head. “Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn’t take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn’t answer to my conscience if I did.”
An Entire Frame Job!

- Brief Encounters with Che Guevara by Ben Fountain
- Bark by Lorrie Moore
- Nothing Gold Can Stay by Ron Rash
Title Fight:
It’s Not a Title Until It Sings

- Ho-hum titles risk sinking a story straight out

- A title must resonate 2 ways:
  - To the eye and ear, on first glance
  - To the reader, on finishing the story

- Seek the thematic zing.
  - This is where the art of writing comes in.
  - What name/ notion encapsulates the story?

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Robert Mangeot

The Short of It: Submission Possible
Cogito Ergo Scribere: What’s Your Goal Writing Stories?

- Check “work published” box on bucket list?
- Score a few credits to line a query letter?
- Earn Few extra bucks?
- Land a piece in [INSERT DREAM MARKET]
- Cultivate rep as a short story writer?
- Support an author brand or novel series?

THERE ARE NO WRONG ANSWERS. WHAT’S YOUR HONEST ONE?

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Well, if they said it…

“So many people can now write competent stories that the short story is in danger of dying of competence.”

--Flannery O’Connor
Every Manuscript Tells 2 Stories

**HOW STRONG THE WRITING**
(plotting, pace, voice, etc.)

**HOW PROFESSIONAL THE AUTHOR**
(polish, formatting, market savvy)

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Sad...But True

COUNTLESS GREAT STORIES NEVER GET PUBLISHED SIMPLY DUE TO SUBMISSION ERRORS

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
There for A Reason

About The Paris Review

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All submissions must be in English and previously unpublished. Translations are acceptable and should be accompanied by a copy of the original text. Simultaneous submissions are also acceptable as long as we are notified immediately if the manuscript is accepted for publication elsewhere.

We strongly suggest to all who submit that they read the most recent issues of The Paris Review to acquaint themselves with material the magazine has published. Subscriptions are available here.

The Paris Review does not accept e-mailed submissions. Fiction manuscripts and essays should be sent to the attention of the Fiction Editor and poetry manuscripts to the Poetry Editor at the following address:
Shunn’s The One

Robert Mangeot
212 Hatton Place
Franklin, TN 37067
(615) 390-2061
rtm@robertmangeot.com

Affiliate Member, NWA, SinC & ITN

about 4,400 words

TWO BAD HAMILTONS AND A HISTORIC JACKSON
by Robert Mangeot

The Secret Service guy asked me to repeat myself, which did not bode well for either his cognitive or listening skills. But he was the Fed and I was the industrial engineer, so I’d go easy on the coaching. Maybe he started Mondays slow.

“You got this place set up all wrong,” I said. “Your credenza is at a severe angle over your right shoulder. You want to pinch a nerve? Between that and, no offense, the low degree of organization on your desk, your frequently used case files aren’t quickly accessible.”

Behind his clutter Special Agent Wiggins failed to hide an

- Format **exactly** as market specifies (if format matters, they will specify)
- Font: auto black, 12pt., Times New Roman, Courier
- Why hurt (doom?) your story’s chances by not following stated guidelines?
- **Respect the editor’s time**; many journals are unpaid labors of love

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
## A Brave New World of Markets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>PRO</th>
<th>CON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print magazine/journal</td>
<td>• Typically better pay, prestige</td>
<td>• High, high-competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Often e-version, too</td>
<td>• Lo-ooong time to pub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Print just feels damn good</td>
<td>• Out-of-print quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-journal</td>
<td>• Thousands of them</td>
<td>• Thousands of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Alive while the site stays up</td>
<td>• Often fledgling or niche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Free link to your readership</td>
<td>• Pay in love, not money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-published</td>
<td>• Total control</td>
<td>• Boost off established routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Direct to target market</td>
<td>• Size of market?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sales flow to you</td>
<td>• Independent eye of editor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthology</td>
<td>• Good exposure, networking</td>
<td>• Sales can be meh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Marketing</td>
<td>• Typically no/low-pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Often print/POD &amp; e-book</td>
<td>• Fit your writing goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contests &amp; Competitions</td>
<td>• Pay</td>
<td>• Brutal competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Potentially huge credit</td>
<td>• Pay to enter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning off writing challenge</td>
<td>• Tied-up pub rights?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
# Cover Letter Dos and Don’ts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Send anyway, even if guidelines say optional</td>
<td>• Omit any requested story or personal info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share your relevant credits</td>
<td>• Share TMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Add a brief personal note if appropriate</td>
<td>• Get casual or name-drop, especially if not acquainted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Treat as a resume letter</td>
<td>• Treat like an agent query</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Dear Bouchercon anthology editors and volunteers,

Attached please find my 4,600-word short story “Crack-up at Waycross” for consideration in the 2015 Bouchercon anthology *Murder Under the Oaks*. The story is unpublished.

And my writing bio follows: Robert Mangeot lives in Nashville, Tennessee with his wife, cats, and trusty Pomeranian. His short fiction appears in various journals and anthologies, including *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, *Mystery Writers of America Presents Ice Cold: Tales of Intrigue from the Cold War* and *The Oddville Press*. His work has won contests sponsored by the Chattanooga Writers' Guild, *On The Premises*, and Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers. He currently serves as chapter Vice President for Sisters in Crime Middle Tennessee. When not writing, he wanders the snack food aisles of America and France.

Thanks for the chance to submit. I’m looking forward to my October trip to Raleigh.

Best regards,
Robert Mangeot
Relax. Many markets need a while to respond.
- Get a sense of a market’s ETA range before submitting
- Wait how long their specs say before querying status
- If they don’t say, wait 3 months minimum

Just keep writing.

Simultaneous submission is your friend – batches of 5-10

A Group:
Dream and Top Market Fits

B Group:
Great Market Fits

C Group:
Next Best Fits (& So Forth Thereafter)
Patience: Part of the Process

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
I Got a No

- Don’t expect detailed feedback
  - And don’t push for any; not their job
  - But take any received to heart

- Don’t get discouraged
  - Maybe they published something similar
  - Maybe it doesn’t fit a current focus, theme

- Don’t assume you’re a misunderstood genius, either

- Don’t stop writing!!!
Read the acceptance carefully.
- Decide ASAP. ASAP!
- Not a negotiation. Don’t get rep as difficult

Typical ask: First rights + anthology rights
- Exclusivity period
- Pro/print markets: promotional rights to use your story excerpts...maybe more

Once agreed, retract immediately any simultaneous submissions! Do it NOW.

2nd rights (re-publication) revert to you
The Short of It: Bring It on In
Well, if *they* said it…
Kurt Vonnegut’s Rules for Story Writing

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things—reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a Sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them—in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.
Local Resources To Help You Along

- *(Ahem...) Sisters in Crime*
- Killer Nashville
- Nashville Writers Meet-Up
- The Porch Collective
- Hanging out at libraries, Parnassus, Southern Festival
Professional writing associations (MWA, SCBWI, SFWA, etc.)

Writers Digest / 2nd Draft

The Interwebs
- OneStory group classes
- LitReactor
- DuoTrope / Submittable / Grinder
Well, if *they* said it...

“I just sit at my typewriter and curse a bit.”

--P.G. Wodehouse
Short stories reward experimentation-Go for it!

But you still gotta tell a story...
- Engaging a reader prerequisite to wowing, informing
- Form only ever serves purpose
- Storytelling is as old as campfires

More experimental = less (readily) publishable

Unless the idea is freaking killer. Then Freaking Killer Rules apply.
Today’s Takeaways


2. A story is a compressed organism; every element deepens the whole – or it’s gotta go.

3. The opening paragraphs frame entire story; the rest plays things out.

4. Readers are your partners. They consume stories in a single sitting. Write accordingly.

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
The Short of It:
An Appendix and Stuff
Robert Mangeot

The Short of It: 

Title Fight

www.robertmangeot.com
Title Fight: Finding the Music

- The essential idea or inciting incident?
- Major resolution of your B.H.G?
- Setting/season integral to tale?
- Famous quotes/sayings, alluded to or punned?
- Tone or style?
Title Fight: Nailing the High Note

1. Don’t rush it or worry much until the idea is coming fully together. Working titles exist for a reason.
2. Study how established authors connect title and story body.
3. Brainstorm titles as a separate mental exercise.
5. Run ideas past your critique group. If you have to explain how a title brings your story alive, you’re losing.
6. Find important double meanings.
7. Avoid famous titles (i.e. “The Lottery”). Google to check freshness.
8. Genre! What works for a lit audience may fall flat for magic realism.

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRITTEN AS</th>
<th>SOLD AS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The New Normal”</td>
<td>“The Food Acquisition Breakdown”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Hungarian Thing”</td>
<td>“Sparks to the Bear’s Hide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“May Day”</td>
<td>“Uprisings at Cap d’Antibes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Good After Bad”</td>
<td>“Two Bad Hamiltons and a Hirsute Jackson”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reprobates”</td>
<td>“The Cumberland Package”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Orb Weaving in Wonderland”</td>
<td>“Queen and Country”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dans Le Lune”</td>
<td>“The Montparnasse Moon Shot”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE TITLE IS YOUR STORY’S ELEVATOR PITCH. DON’T LET AN EARLY IDEA GET IN YOUR WAY.**

Robert Mangeot, “The Short of It"
The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely, settled--but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong. It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.
## Classic Story Structure

![Diagram of Classic Story Structure]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0 – 25%</th>
<th>26 – 50%</th>
<th>51 – 75%</th>
<th>76 – 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT ONE</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACT TWO</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACT THREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SETUP</strong> Orphan</td>
<td><strong>RESPONSE</strong> Wanderer</td>
<td><strong>ATTACK</strong> Warrior</td>
<td><strong>RESOLUTION</strong> Martyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAR’ZATION 1:</strong> 1st Dimension</td>
<td><strong>CHAR’ZATION 2:</strong> 1st &amp; 2nd Dimension</td>
<td><strong>CHAR’ZATION 3:</strong> 2nd Dimension</td>
<td><strong>CHAR’ZATION 4:</strong> 3rd Dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC surface traits &amp; masks shown, consequences glimpsed</td>
<td>Inner demons hold MC back; 2nd Dim reasons explored</td>
<td>MC coming to grips with masks &amp; Inner Demons</td>
<td>MC evolves, conquers inner demons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary World interrupted</td>
<td>“Flail and fail” MC responds to new situation – poorly. Antagonist in control; MC not fully aware</td>
<td>Proactive, empowered by hope &amp; progress Aggressively fights antagonist – and loses</td>
<td>Hero unshackled; better equipped to fight antagonist – and wins Willing to “die” if nec.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robert Mangeot, “The Short of It”
Swain Model for Scene/Segment Continuity

Motivation

- Objective, whether external good or internal need
- Experienced by 1+ senses that immerse the reader

Reaction

1. Feeling (*instantaneous*)
2. Reflex (*instinctive*)
3. Rational Action
4. Rational Speech

- Always in above order; OK to skip but remainder in sequence
- Tracks our mind/body experiential time scale

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
**SCENE**

1. **GOAL:**
   POV wants something at the beginning of the scene

2. **CONFLICT:**
   POV confronts obstacles & people out to stop GOAL

3. **DISASTER:**
   What prevents POV from reaching GOAL *(make it bad!)*

**SEQUEL**

4. **REACTION:**
   POV’s emotional recovery from DISASTER

5. **DILEMMA:**
   POV sorts through to least bad option

6. **DECISION:**
   POV decides on fresh course, establishes new GOAL

Bigger conflict / disaster = Better conflict / disaster

Choice selected = risky but wisely made, with a chance of success

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Open Sesame: Options

- Mood-O-Rama: “Rêve Haitien”

- Speaker Has Floor: “Jeeves and the Song of Songs”

- Big Problem: “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”

- Slam Bang!: “The Trusty”

- Hidden Meaning: Frame the B.H.M.

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Compress to Impress

- Every word matters
- Every beat does double-duty
- Every sentence launches the next one
- Every passage leads toward a singular ending

If you can remove a word, a sentence, an element and your story still holds together, remove it.

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Let’s Not Blow This out of Proportion

- Battle for precious space. Stuff has to do double duty.
- Reader importance = page space spent on it
- Central conflict reaction develops character
- Room for reader inference (Iceberg Theory)
- Less detail as the story drives to its B.H.M.

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"
Narrative carries more load
- PRO: readily shaped to purpose and flow
- CON: POV can become snoozefest...or sociopath
- Action, inner/sensory moments, passage of time

Dialogue carries more punch
- PRO: the spoken word has POWER
- CON: slows time and word choice to realistic speech

Narrative sets tone, dialogue “dances around the fire”

Whatever you do, use dialogue consistently
- Lots of it, regular intervals
- Key emphasis at important moments
- The whole darn thing as dialogue
A Story About Stories

Robert Mangeot, "The Short of It"