The Long and Short of It: Short Stories That Evolved Into Novels

Description:
“This should be a novel” is a common form of praise given to a short story in a workshop, but what does this really mean? Many short stories work wonderfully in their smaller containers, brimming with novelistic complexity and scope. But sometimes what begins as a short story begs to be more. Five writers discuss examples of stories that transformed into novels while also illuminating their winding paths from 5000 words to 80,000+ and how this path changed their relationship with shorter forms.

Participants:
Sequoia Nagamatsu is the author of the story collection, Where We Go When All We Were Is Gone. His stories have appeared in Conjunctions, ZYZZYVA, Black Warrior Review, and the Fairy Tale Review, among others. He is an editor of Psychopomp Magazine and an assistant professor at St. Olaf College.

Sakinah Hofler is a PhD student and an Alfred C. Yates Fellow at the University of Cincinnati. Her poetry and prose has appeared in multiple literary journals and magazines. She has won the Manchester Fiction Prize and the Sherwood Anderson Fiction Prize.

Cara Benson has been published in The New York Times, Boston Review, Electric Literature, and anthologized in Best American Poetry. Author of the prose/poem collection (made), she's received a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship and the bpNichol Award. She is an instructor for Grub Street.

Ruth Joffre is the author of the story collection Night Beast. She is a graduate of Cornell University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop and now teaches at Hugo House in Seattle.

Introductions & Opening Statement
Questions: (These questions may change. An updated outline will be uploaded in the weeks leading to the conference. Physical copies will be available at the panel.)

1. Briefly talk about what makes you excited about the short story form and the first instance that you discovered that a novel was a related but entirely different enterprise? What’s different from the short story you wrote and the novel you wrote or are writing? Why did you feel like a novel was a necessary narrative container for the story you wanted to tell?

2. Let’s talk about plot and structure. The wonderful thing about short stories is that you can finish them (or at least a draft of one) in a relatively short period of time. You might even be able to hold the narrative arc, all the necessary movements of a character inside of your head (or on page of notes). But trying to contain a novel in your head is another matter. Discuss your strategies for exploding the short story to novel length. Was your short story chapter one? Was your short story a compressed version of the entire arc?

3. Would you re-write your short story differently now that you’ve learned more about your characters and world (and likely created new characters and problems along the way)? How has the experience of writing a novel changed your relationship with the short story form?

4. What have been some of the common pitfalls about diving into longer work? How have you tried to address these issues?

5. What are some short stories and novels that helped you learn to write longer? What are some of the most important lessons about long form writing that you’ve gotten from the work of others?

Audience Questions