



Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular: An Informal Textbook

By L. Rust Hills

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The classic handbook of short story writing, now revised and updated.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"There are now not enough commercial magazines regularly publishing literary fiction to count on the fingers of a single hand," says Rust Hills. So why bother writing literary short stories, or books about doing so? Because, says Hills, a longtime fiction editor at *Esquire*, "what young writers want to write, or ought to want to write, is literature." In *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular*, Hills examines "the essential techniques of fiction and how they function." The short story is a tricky form, with no margin for error: "The successful contemporary short story," says Hills, "will demonstrate a more harmonious relationship of all its aspects than will any other literary art form, excepting perhaps lyric poetry." Many of the fictional elements discussed in this book will not be new to most fiction writers. We know that stories must have beginnings, middles, and ends; we know about epiphany and suspense and stock characters. But Hills claims that much of how we look at fiction derives from drama theory and from the formulas of "slick fiction" (fiction that once served the purpose mindless television now serves). Learned but not pedantic, Hills addresses these elements strictly in terms of literary short fiction.

An interesting side note here is Hills's discussion of the shift in support for American writers. "It is no longer the book publishers and magazines," he says, "but rather the colleges and universities that ... provide the major financial support for the great majority of American writers today." Given that, we might find it odd that this book comes from a man best known for his magazine editing. But we shouldn't. "Teaching fiction writing and editing magazine fiction have ... the same rather odd ultimate purpose in common: trying to get someone else to produce a fine short story." One caveat emptor: our copy of this edition fell quite apart upon our first, gentle reading of it. --*Jane Steinberg*

Review

"When [Hills] writes about writing, we should all pay close attention." -- Richard Yates

"Admirable, wise, and comradely." -- John Leggett

"Every aspiring fiction writer ought to read this." --WRITER'S DIGEST

About the Author

Lawrence Rust Hills (9 November 1924 – 12 August 2008) was an American author and fiction editor at *Esquire* from 1957 to 1964, though he remained associated with the magazine until 1999.

Authors he championed include Norman Mailer, John Cheever, William Styron, Bruce Jay Friedman, William Gaddis, James Salter, Don DeLillo, Ann Beattie, Richard Ford, Raymond Carver and E. Annie Proulx.

His 1972 book *How To Do Things Right: The Revelations of a Fussy Man* was a set of humorous essays filled with obsessively-detailed instructions on, for example, the correct way to make and eat milk-toast.

His 1979 book *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular* outlined his views on short story craft.

Hills died in Belfast, Maine of cardiac arrest

Users Review

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Mark Frey:

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