

Writing and Selling to the Secret Short Story Market.

Confessing for Money

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CHAPTER 1: WHAT A CONFESSION IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

According to my dictionary, one of the definitions of the word *confessions* is... “a voluntary admission by an individual who has learned his/her lesson the hard way.” We’ll accept that. It is also the secret short story market which is always buying, buying, buying.

WHO READS THESE MAGAZINES?

The confessions we’ll be discussing in this book are the same magazines that caused your grandmother to say to your mother, “Don’t bring those magazines into this house.” They are now published by the Dorchester Media Magazine Group and they usually sit together in the drug store or grocery store or convenience store magazine rack. Four of them are directed to the white female: True Confessions, True Story, True Romance and True Love. Six are for the black female: Black Confessions, Black Romance, Black Secrets, Bronze Thrills, Jive and True Black Experience. The two groups are fairly different in content. The main differences you’ll notice at the newsstand will appear in the color of the models who pose for the illustrations for the stories and for the color of the pretty woman on the cover. Payment is a bit less at the Black Confessions.

Your mother paid attention to your grandmother in a certain way. She didn’t bring the confessions home but she continued to read them, nevertheless, at the beauty shop, at school, or at the houses of her friends whose mothers read the magazines and saw no reason why their daughters and friends shouldn’t read them.

These days, girls and women of all ages are still reading them, particularly the blue collar or pink collar workers or wives of blue collar workers. (Pink collar workers are women who

work at traditional women's jobs which do not require the worker to get dirty... secretaries, hair stylists, cashiers, store clerks, day care workers, etc.)

NO LONGER SIN, SUFFER AND REPENT

Your grandmother was wrong when she forbade your mother to read confessions. At the time she told your mother that, the stories were not just stories of sexual misbehavior as grandma suspected, they were quite moral stories which told stories of girls who sinned, of girls who suffered for their sins, and of girls who repented of their sins and then lived happily ever after because they had done the right things.

Few modern confessions follow the sin, suffer and repent formula of yesterday but these magazines are still highly moral in outlook and presentation. Generally speaking they demonstrate common American values, the things most American women hold dear such as a lifetime marriage plan, family interaction, care for others, family closeness, etc. Nearly every story is about some young, middle aged or older female's problem of the moment and how she handles it wrong, then how she faces the problem and herself and overcomes whatever is bothering her. Few of the protagonists in these stories are male but editors do like to buy an occasional male viewpoint story. Today's confession magazines are in the aid, service, and education business.

ONE PERSON'S PROBLEM AND HOW SHE/HE HANDLES IT

It's true that today's stories don't focus on "sin, suffer and repent," although there are still a few of that type. The disgrace of the illegitimate child has gone the way of all flesh. Sorry. But hey! We still have a world of problems, don't we? What is a problem to a middle class intellectual writer can also be a problem to a confessions heroine. (Except for the problem of getting published, perhaps.)

Perhaps since modern morés are a great deal more accepting of unmarried sex, children born out of wedlock, divorce, and other so-called “sins” of the 1940s and 50s, there are still a few sins for our heroines to jump into even today.

Our confessions are about today’s women’s problems. We write about one problem per story. Too many beginning writers think they must load all of their protagonist’s problems into one story... but that doesn’t work. Modern readers want to learn about the heroine’s one problem that is now bothering her, one problem and how she got into that mess, how she handles it, and finally, how everything turns out okay for her... or at least how she looks forward to a hopeful future. Readers of these stories believe them to be true stories and they *are* based upon real happenings in today’s world. Many a wife has discovered that her husband, ol’ Bubba, has been sniffing cocaine, so if you sit down and write a story of such a wife and tell how she handled the problem, you’re writing a story based on a true happening, aren’t you? And by helping your narrator to solve the story problem you’re helping your readers find a way to handle their own cocaine sniffing Bubbas.

IMPLICIT MORAL VALUES OUR READERS HOLD

The moral of the story (what our narrator learns) should not be pointed out directly as authors used to do in the old days. We need to write today’s story with the implicit moral underscored by what our characters say, do and think.

What are the morals (values) most clearly demonstrated in confessions? There are several and every story demonstrates one or more of them.

Those implicit morals are:

- Shacking up is okay but legal marriage is much better.

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- Marriage without children is okay but legal marriage with two or more children is infinitely better.
 - A child born out of wedlock is okay but being born a child to loving (married) parents is a thousand times better.
 - Practicing no religion is okay but attending church occasionally is better: Attending an established church consistently and taking part in the church activities is the best of all possible worlds.
 - Getting government help to live is okay if there is no other way, but working and caring for your own by the sweat of your brow is ever so much better.
 - Leaving your children in childcare is okay but being a stay-at-home-mother, although seldom possible, is top-of-the-trees better.
 - Sending sick, older or disabled family members to an institution to be cared for by others is okay but to care for your own loved one within your family is the really correct way to handle such problems if you can manage to do so.

In other words, our readers have accepted without question the middle class American values of *Father, Mother, and two kids all living in a loving home where the extended family works and attends church and takes part in community activities together.*

WHY WRITE CONFESSIONS?

If you're determined to write short fiction this may be a good field for you. Confessions need to be based on fact but if you can sign the publisher's contract, "Based on fact" with a good heart,

then you can write confessions and make some money with your short stories. Our readers consider all the stories in our magazines to be truthful transcripts of what happened to our main characters so it is best to keep mum outside the writing community, best not to say that the confessions are made-up stories based on life's realities. That's why I like to call the confessions our secret short story market.

There is a catch. You must study the confessions markets. See what the editors are looking for. Genre fiction, which is a fancy fiction writer word for category material, is what we're dealing with here. You do have to quit listening to your mother or your English teacher screaming inside your head and just march yourself right up to the nearest magazine rack and buy an assortment of the magazine. They have names like *True Confessions*, *True Romance*, *Bronze Thrills*, but you're not through yet. You must read the magazines back to front, then come up with a character, usually a blue collar worker or wife of a blue collar worker and then give her a problem. Then you'll be ready to write.

While you continue to try to perfect your commercial slick magazine short story, your romance novel, your mid-list woman's fiction, your literary bestseller, you can, at the same time, be working up to that prestigious sale and practicing your art right now by driving in the category lane as a confession writer and you can make a little money while you're doing it. Of course, you do want money for your work don't you?

You've heard what the Victorian literary light, Dr. Johnson said, haven't you? He said, "Only a blockhead would write for anything but money."

Remember... one problem, a wrong choice or two and, finally, your narrator finds her way out of the maze and looks at the future with hope. Sound easy? It's not, but it is do-able...and if you do it right you can start cashing checks.

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