

Tweeting "War and Peace" by Bobbie Ann Mason and Meg Pokrass

by Meg Pokrass

"Tweeting War and Piece" by Bobbie Ann Mason and Meg Pokrass was originally published in The Nervous Breakdown blog. It appears at New Flash Fiction Review with Permission of the authors.

Peg Mokrass, world-class literary agent with a keen specialty in tweet, micro, and flash, telephones writer Bobbie Ann Mason about the micro-fiction trend sweeping the globe...

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PM: Ms. Mason, many writers are making comebacks with bundled twitterings of their original works. In this pioneering spirit, I boldly suggest we shrink your classic novels into spicy Kindle-Android rolls and twitter-package them...

BAM: Like bird seed?

PM: As the world's top micro-fiction agent under the age of thirty, I am fascinated to learn that a lot of iconic types—Oates, Updike, Mailer, Hemingway—are the real founders of the micro-fictionist movement. They just didn't know it. Ernest Hemingway is best remembered for his six-word masterwork “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” Nobody reads his longer works anymore, or if they do, they don't share them on Pinterest or Twitter.

BAM: Oh, pshaw! The Hemingway baby-shoes story is allegedly apocryphal! Have scholars proved he wrote it? I'm not aware that any of the others in that so-called iconic bunch ever wrote microscopic fiction. Nobody is reading anything long. That's why there is no twittering chez Hemingway.

PM: Someday all will see so clearly how great novels like *War and Peace* could have been accomplished in tweets.

BAM: I just devoted several months to reading that monster. And I could have waited for the tweet edition?

PM: It could have been blasted in many micro-tweets.

BAM: The tweet and the takeaway are cousins. I hate takeaway.

PM: One must try to be open to new technologies. Do you practice yoga?

BAM: Yoga is not a technology. Nor is takeaway. English teachers swear by the takeaway. What does the poem mean? What is the theme? Why didn't Tolstoy just define war and peace and get it over with?

PM: Naked yoga is highly recommended for desperation. So many adorable cage-free poses. In a similar way, pole dancing is the new wilderness for blocked creatives.

BAM: The next step, I suppose, is flash fiction. Yawn.
Where does this term flash come from? Flash in the pan?
Streakers?

PM: No! Pans are something women used for cooking before they were emancipated. Streakers sound **DISGUSTING**, whatever they were!

I personally feel that flash is very bright and very small.

Like a dermatological freckle-tester. So small that often the human heart can't tolerate it.

BAM: You sound serious.

PM: Brevity is huge! It is what all modern writers are aiming for. Although it's hard on the eyes to read so many tiny stories, I believe small is mighty and mighty is often very small.

BAM: I bet you never read *War and Peace*. Except maybe in Classic Comics.

PM: *War and Peace* was attractive when books were overweight. When cellulite was chic.

BAM: Just what would you do with *War and Peace* in today's market? Do your stuff, Ms. Mokrass...

PM: Re-package *War and Peace* into two mini-books, if not twelve. *War* and *Peace*—totally different market segments. Targeted blasts, all leading to increased sales. Leo's job would be to break it down to around ten million tweets.

BAM: That's a lot of tweets. Would there be a melody?

PM: When I was a very small child I read *Peace*. I refused to read *War*. *War* was not at all about love, desire, or demonic sex cravings.

BAM: How small a child? You missed the lusty soldiers bivouacked in the villages. And the humor. I'm still giggling about Napoleon the night before the battle strutting around in his uniform at three a.m. drinking tea and wondering why he can't sleep.

PM: Giggling about insomnia, exhibitionism, caffeine addiction, and anxiety?

BAM: Why wouldn't Tolstoy laugh at Napoleon?

PM: It is not funny to laugh at diminutive, anxious people or powerful micro-tweets.

BAM: *War and Peace* does have the feel of a Masterpiece Theatre series, but ten million tweets would be like a starling invasion.

PM: I believe Masterpiece Theater will shortly be replaced by Micropiece Theater.

BAM: Shortly?

PM: This is really the tiny-most tippy-top of the proverbial iceberg. Ms. Mason, you were, after all, part of that minimalism thing back in the eighties!

BAM: Minimalism was all I heard then! It didn't mean micro-fiction. It meant thin and spare and without feeling. Whenever the label got slapped on a writer it was like finding the TSA inspection tag inside your luggage. (Oh, no, they've been here, poking into my life and finding it empty.)

Minimalism also meant fiction about underprivileged people who couldn't possibly have deep thoughts, much less utter a metaphor, because they spend their lives at Kmart or in front of the TV or at boring jobs in some stupid factory.

PM: Did you have to write by hand?

BAM: No, I did *not* have to write by hand! We had electric typewriters. Strange as it may seem, they wouldn't fit in the pocket.

PM: That must have been very uncomfortable.

BAM: We didn't wear them!

PM: Did they work on the same principle as texting?

BAM: Texting and tweeting are not tatting.

PM: You've lost me.

BAM: Tatting? My granny ruined her eyes tatting. Tatting is to fine lace what tweeting is to birdshit.

PM: Your mind is blocked. So tragic! One final idea: Would you at least consider creating a new designer novel written in fragments and shards? We could twitter-blast it into the stratosphere! Imagine constellations of enormous brevity! Your fiction reinvented with a modern, cosmetic thrust! I'd be personally thrilled to re-brand you as—

BAM: Excuse me, I have an emergency. My dog just jumped over the fence and raced off to join a pack of wild dogs.

PM: Ms. Mason? Are you still here?

@DearPeg

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bios:

**Bobbie Ann Mason** majored in English at the University of Kentucky and received her Ph.D. at the University of Connecticut. Her first short stories were published in *The New Yorker* and her first book of fiction, *Shiloh & Other Stories*, won the PEN/Hemingway Award. Her first novel, *In Country*, is taught widely in classes and was made into a Norman Jewison film. Mason's newest novel, *The Girl in the Blue Beret*, ventures into World War II and the ways it is remembered. Her memoir, *Clear Springs*, about an American farm family throughout the twentieth century, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

**Meg Pokrass** is the author of "Here, Where We Live" forthcoming in "My Very End of the Universe": Five Novellas-in-Flash and a Study of the Form (Rose Metal Press, 2014). She is the author of 2 story collections, "Damn Sure Right" (Press 53, 2011) and "Bird Envy". Her flash and prose poetry have appeared in many literary journals, and widely anthologized, most recently in "Flash Fiction International" (W.W. Norton, 2015) and "Roadside Curiosities: Stories of American Pop Culture" (University of Leipzig Press/Picador).

