

CREATIVE WRITINGS: SIX-WORD SHORT STORIES BEHIND THE TAILGATES OF TRUCKS

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ABSTRACT

Hemingway made a breakthrough against the rules of the novel when he came up with his six-word short story. **For sale: Baby shoes, never worn.** Using only six words, he was able to engage readers' attention on creating an opened outline of a narrative construct by viewing the situations in a chronological plot design of what had happened, what is happening, and what will happen to who might be involved in this situation, the ones could be said as the characters of this six-words story; one of them obviously would be the baby itself. Hemmingway's short story style seems to be popular in Indonesia even without fully awareness by the Indonesian. This is a phenomenal issue in Indonesia, which can be considered as part of creativity and entertainment, as creative fun writings are easily found behind the tailgates or mud guards of the trucks. "**Anda butuh waktu, kami butuh uang**" (You need time, we need money) is one of the writing popular written behind the truck triggering questions like who 'you' and 'we' refer to? Why you need money and we need money? What had happened between 'you' and 'we'? How do 'you' and 'we' compromise at the end? This six-word writing has created a narrative structure, which context has probably been understood by Indonesians. This article is about writings behind the trucks, which composing stories creatively. The plot structures and the implicit messages will be analyzed through the choice of the words in the writings.

Keywords: six-word short story, writings, plot structures.

INTRODUCTION

Since long time ago, literature has become a part of the culture, which is always expanding following the movement years and centuries. Everyone brings the different subjective or point of view of what an author has written. Wellek and Warren (1956:15) states that literature cannot be 'studied' at all. We can only read, enjoy, and appreciate it. Stories can be divided into short stories, novel, or novella. The divisions are classified based

on several criteria like the number of words, the complexity of the plot, and the role of the characters. Technically a short story is anywhere between 3,500 to 7,500 words. If a story is less than 1,000 words, it would be considered flash fiction, which, by the way, is a growing market. If a short story is longer than 17,000 words, it would be considered a novella, and more than 40,000 words could be called novel (Hunbbel Meer). Short stories are also structured differently than novels. Novels have time to explore the full three-act structure. However, short stories only have space to write a segment of the three-act structure, usually a segment that leads up to a major, transformative event for the main character. A good example of a major event is William Faulkner's short story, "A Rose for Emily," which centers on the discovery of the shy main character's dead, decaying body in her home. The rest of the story is just build up and explanation for that one central event. Finally, short stories only focus on one major character. Novels have room to explore the lives of several major characters. For example, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* we closely follow the life of Jane Bennett and her relationship with Mr. Bingley. Writing sub-plots into a short story is. They're too brief to focus on the life of more than one major character (<http://letswriteashortstory.com>).

In 1910 a brief article titled "Tragedy of Baby's Death is Revealed in Sale of Clothes" was printed in a Spokane, Washington newspaper, and the text discussed a small classified advertisement. Perhaps this article or an article of this type provided the inspiration for the flash fiction. Boldface has been added to excerpts below:

The world is indeed a complication of joys and sorrows, a continuous play made up of tragedy and comedy, and even in every day life, items and experience, small and unusual to us, perhaps, is woven a little story of the heart.

Last Saturday an ad. appeared in a local paper which read: "**Baby's hand made trousseau and baby's bed for sale. Never been used.**" The address was on East Mission street.

This perhaps meant little to the casual reader, yet to the mother who had spent hours and days planning the beautiful things for her tiny baby, it meant a keen sorrow and disappointment.

She had perhaps, dreamed of the time when her little one should be grown up and could, with a source of pride, look back upon its babyhood days and display the handiwork of its mother in the first baby clothes worn and the first trundle bed it had slept in when it first opened its eyes upon the beauties of the world.

But the hand of fate had been unkind and took from the devoted parents the little one which was destined to be the sunshine and light of their life, and the mother, in a desire to forget her sorrow by parting with anything which reminded her of the little one, advertised the garments at a sacrifice.

From this excerpt, Hemmingway' came with his six-word story: "**For sale: Baby shoes, never worn**", making it an extreme example of what is called flash fiction or sudden fiction. Although it is often attributed to Ernest Hemingway, the link to him is unsubstantiated and similarly titled stories predate him. The words 'never born' bring to mind a series of questions that concern the possible histories and indeed the possible futures of the various characters that operate outside the confines of the short text. For instance, who is selling the shoes: is it a single person? A couple? Do they still have a relationship? Or has their world has been pulled apart? And the baby: are the shoes merely a gift never worn? Or was there a miscarriage or a cot death perhaps? Why the shoes have never been worn? By asking these questions, there is the potential for a prose narrative, however short, to convey meaning and to provide subtext and narrative strands that both begin before and continue after the text itself.

The phenomenon of a six-word short story is unique and its existence is getting countable. In Indonesia, though the theories of this flash story is less known by Indonesia people in general, the six-word stories are easily found and read every day. Through the creative writings written at the tailgates or mud-boards of trucks, readers are entertained and served with various life stories. A writing likes "**Anda butuh waktu, kami butuh uang**" (You need time, we need money) is a product of literature, can be categorized as a six-word short story, as the word 'literature' is defined as any written forms since it etymologically derives from Latin *litteratura/litteratura* 'writing formed with letters', although some definitions include spoken or sung texts. Literature can give us something to learn about life. It can be used to portray all the things that occur in reality. There are fictions, which are made, based on true story and have a close relation with reality. Besides, there are also fictions that tell us about love, war, poverty, and all the things that we can actually seen in the

real world. Pickering and Hoepfer (1969:11) say that fiction is the relationship between the created world of the given work and the real world art objective experience. The writings behind the trucks are interesting to be analyzed to learn about life viewed from marginal people, who spend their lives on the street as truck drivers. This paper is to analyze the short writings behind the trucks from the structuring of the story, plot developments, characterizations, and points of view of the writers.

DISCUSSION

Liam Murray Bell proposed an idea that apart from the simplicity of words in a six-word short story, it should cover four key aspects of writing prose: structuring a story, developing plot, characterization, and point-of-view (2010).

Structuring a story can be done in a basic linear structure, one known a flat or chronological, a flashback, or a combination between the two. Blake Morrison, as quoted by Bell (2010), creatively portrayed a life passes from birth to death in his six-word story: “Womb. Bloom. Groom. Gloom. Rheum. Tomb.” With his flash writing, Morrison was able to tell readers an entire human life process. The plot of the story is a basic linear construct of beginning-middle-end. One’s life is started in a woman’s womb then he/she is born and growing up from childhood, into adulthood, then entering the aging period before finally dies. This linear storyline is not the only one a writer does in creating a narrative to engage the readers’ attention. Through “Dad called: DNA back: he isn’t”, Heden Fielding tried to start her story from middle-beginning-end structure. Liam Murray Bell examined Fielding’s six-word story did not conform to the beginning-middle-end structure of Aristotle, but instead presumed a central event of the DNA results. This can be seen as occurring approximately in the middle of the natural story, thereby inviting speculation as to the reasons for the test and the potential fallout from it. Readers can engage with the story themselves by triggering themselves to questions like: Who are the possible characters mentioned in this short story? What has happened so they need to have a DNA check? What will happen after the DNA’s result is known? If Fielding were to expand her story, she could structure it from present to past, past to present, or it could event jump backwards and forwards between the two.

In developing the plot, Bell suggested two ways: temporal and causal plotting and a self-reflexive manner plotting. Temporality (being the engagement with the question ‘What

will happen next?') is highlighted to engage with the causality. Simon Armitage six-word story, "Megan's baby: John's surname: Jim's eyes", ticking readers to build a plot based on two basic questions of 'What has happened' and "What will happen next?". More than this, however, readers can engage with a six-word short story in a self-reflective manner, examining the ways in which writers can draw the reader into their writing, their ability to suspense or intrigue as Ashley Stokes said that, "the underside of the stone that no one sees. It is the head labor that makes a novel realize itself on its own terms" (Stokes, 2001).

The third aspect, after structuring the story and developing a plot is characterizations. According to Malcolm Bradbury, characterization is intimately linked to plot, "Plot is itself often the product of a character or characters in their processes of development, growing self-knowledge or interactions with others. So plot itself is the product of human actions or adventures." (Bradbury, 2011) Bell then came out with four types of characterization: autobiographical (whereby the author includes aspects of themselves in the character), biographical (whereby the author includes aspects of others), from scratch characterization (whereby a character is entirely fictional and is created from the grown up), and a combination method that involves autobiography, biography, and from scratch characters. Like A.L. Kennedy's six word story: "He didn't. She did. Big Mistakes." Kennedy could be drawing on autobiography in constructing this story, transposing a scenario from her own life. Bradbury contented that characters could be observed, invented, and created from ones' lives, observations, senses of the motives of others, fascinations with cultures and mannerisms (2001).

The final aspect is point-of-view, which is divided into a first-person narrative like in Hani Kunzru's six-word story: "Stop me before I kill again" and a third-person narrative like in Andrew O'Hagan's: "Purse found. "No notes," she said." Bell said that in first person, it is possible only to give the thoughts of that characters or to give them speculating on the thoughts or opinions of another character, whereas in a third-person narrative, the story is limited or subjects to an omniscient narrator (Bell, 2010). A second-person narrative is possible though rarely used.

The analysis of this paper will focus on the six-word writings popular written behind the tailgates or on the mud-guards of trucks in Indonesia, as follows:

1. Anda butuh waktu, kami butuh uang
2. Bila pulang dicaci, tak pulang dicari
3. Bersatu di pangkalan bersaing di jalanan
4. Besar di rantau, tua di jalan

The analysis of the writings will be based on the Bell's ideas on four key aspects of writing prose: structuring a story, developing plot, characterization, and point-of-view.

1. Anda Butuh Waktu, Kami Butuh Uang (You Need Time, We Need Money)

This six-word story is structured in a combination between a basic linear structure and a flashback structure. The story is using a middle-ending-beginning structure. 'We' state their opinion of what they need, apart from their speculation on what 'you' might need. The structure then triggers questions of what has happened before, which probably the beginning of the story, between 'We' and 'You' so that a statement of needs declared. This might include the conflict between the two parties. Then the story comes to the ending of finding out what might happen to both parties. How the conflict between 'we' and 'you' might be coped. The plot of this six-word story is a temporal and causal plotting. That condition demands an answer of "What will happen next?" The characterization used is a combination method that involves autobiography, biography, and from scratch characters. The authors include themselves in the story by addressing themselves as 'we', and at the same time create another character from the scratch character, can be fictional or not obvious, as it is addressed with the word 'you'. The point of view used in this story is second-person narratives, recalling a communal nouns or groups of characters.

'We' closely refers to the drivers and crew of the trucks, whereas 'you' might refer to car drivers and motorists. There is a binary opposition offered by the truck driver: car drivers and motorists need time as truck drivers need money. Truck is a big vehicle. It is big in size and heavy in load. Its existence on the road usually takes the whole side of the road. It is worsened with its low speed due to its burden. Cars drivers and motorists running behind the truck might find it difficult to pass it. Trucks

are often accused as the source of traffic jams and slow travelling, which cause less of hospitality offered to truck drivers and crew. Cars and motorcycles beep and honk their horns as signs for trucks to give them, ways to pass, since those car drivers and motorists need to race with time. As time is precious for car drivers and motorists due to the businesses they might have, it is also same for the trucks' drivers to take their ways, no matter how slowly it is to earn money. What will happen next after this confession is made? A six-word story ends openly. It can be an understanding between two party is achieved, so all road users will appreciate each other and have a safely drive, or a competition is sharpened, which leads to 'street fighting' to reach each party's goal.

2. Bila Pulang Dicaci, Tak Pulang Dicari (Going Home: Scolded. Not Home: Searched)

The structure of the story is in a chronological order. The word 'going home' indicates 'leaving home' first, and then two possibilities occurred: to going home or not going home, each brings different consequence. The cause and effect plays roles in developing the plot with these questions as guides: 'Where has that person gone?', 'Why is that person scolded?', 'Where does that person probably go if he or she is not going home?', and 'Why is that person searched?' Mentioning no obvious characters does not mean that the characterization of the six-word story is none. Since this writing is found at the back of the trucks, it means that the main character is highly to be the driver of the truck. Another character would be someone at home, who closely refers to wife. The writer uses third-person narratives to deliver the story, indicating that this story can be experienced by anyone, not limited to a referred person or a proper noun.

Truck drivers, mostly men, leave their families for a period of time to earn money. A job of a truck driver is not a prestigious job, offering low income with high risks. Even if the payment is satisfactory, a driver might not bring a full payment due to his needs on the way, not mentioning the risks of accidents or compensation of the vehicle damages he needs to pay. 'How much will he bring home to meet the family end?' 'What happens if he does not bring enough to fulfill the family needs. He would

be scolded by people at home, his wife to be named. The dilemma is waiting: to going home or not going home. 'If he is not going home, where he might be?' What will happen next?' The people at his home would probably search for him, for various possible reasons: worrying about his safety, suspecting him of leaving the family, or being frightened of losing a family income.

3. Bersatu di Pangkalan Bersaing di Jalanan (Unite at Base. Compete on Road.)

The story is structures in basic linear structure: beginning, middle, and ending. The way the plot is presented is in self-reflective manner, allowing readers to examining the ways in which writers can draw the reader into their writing, their ability to suspense or intrigue. The characters, viewed from the words 'bersatu-unite' and 'bersaing-compete', can be grouped as an autobiography if the authors (the truck drivers) includes aspects of themselves as speakers of this writings. The point of view of this writing is first person points of view. Though hidden, the main characters of the story are the truck drivers themselves, who are sharing their life in a community.

Referring to the plot of this six-word short story, it is understandable that the story is started from the drivers' lives as friends in the base. The feeling of solidarity and the sense of belonging as a part of community united these truck drivers. However, the settings described are not only in the base, but also on the road. The solemn lives in the base turns to be intrigues or problems once they are on the ways. From friends, these drivers tend to be rivals on the road. Street life is tough, but why they compete for? Money? Time? What will happen at the end of the story, the resolution of the story can be either the competitions last long, or the peace presents as they meet at the base again.

4. Besar di Rantau, Tua di Jalan (Growing in Wander, Aging on Roads)

The structure of the story is a basic linear structure, with a chronological plot. The choices of the words indicate a process of life experience by a truck driver, leaving the hometown for a period of time, living a street-life, and finally getting old on the road. The characters are the truck drivers themselves, sharing a life experience,

sounding irony. The point of view is a first person point of view; the drivers speak for themselves.

The story is delivered in a chronological order, telling readers about a life of a truck driver. Once one decides to be a truck driver, the person is ready to spend his life wandering from one place to another place. Most of his life would be spent on the roads, transporting things. A truck driver's life could be said as a modern nomadic life, since the driver shortly stays in a place, even to be with the family. From twenties turning thirties, thirties turning forties, until that person is aging, he would be a 'on the wheels' man. Readers are triggered with questions like: How long does a person commit his career as a truck driver? What would happen if that person quits his job? The writer of this six-word story is aware about the consequences of getting through a life as a truck driver, and the other side there is a longing of quitting such a life and start a normal life.

CONCLUSION

Apart from all obscurities of details in a six-word short story, the benefit of it is that it allows for the drawing out of strands of fiction writing with self-contained and easily accessible examples that do not require close-reading or explanations of contexts. Readers have freedoms to elaborate their stories by developing their own plots, creating and assuming the characters and their characterizations, and defining points of view that contribute a lot in structuring the short story. The writings on the tailgates behind trucks in Indonesia invite smiles as a sign of entertainments, but in deeper thought it offers stories with the truck drivers and crew as the main characters.

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