

## On Writing Micro-Memoirs

I'm interested in the moment, which, sequestered by white space, expands to include the universe. I'm interested in truth-telling. I'm interested in the small in size—the *seemingly* modest—a rebuttal to the white-whale-great-American-novel, the model put forward by Hemingway/Mailer/Roth/Franzen, where size is the only thing that matters. I'm writing micro-memoirs, small true stories about my life, dignifying the diminutive with my attention.

When I realized I was writing a whole collection of these micro-memoirs, I identified my goals. First, I wanted each piece to get in and get out fast; to sculpt a world in as little ink as I could. Second, I wasn't interested in creating fragments, pieces that rely on others to make sense. I wanted each to be its own thing—a very small thing, yes, but not an incomplete thing. Third, even though I was working with the building block of the sentence, I wanted the book to have some physical variation, so the pieces don't look identical and the rhythms of the collection (for a reader who reads straight through) would have the rhythms of a piece of music, say. Fourth, I wanted the collection to feel expansive and diverse in terms of mood or tone, so that while individual pieces might capture just one emotion—humor or sadness or wistfulness or what have you—there would be many different emotions represented, so in that way, the book would attempt to capture the fullness of the human experience. I suppose that sounds a little highfalutin'. What I mean is that I wanted to write the most *me* into the book that I could; I wanted to write the *me*-est book possible.

As for the influences on the book, there were several. Lydia Davis would be easy to guess. From her, I learned courage, learned to be comfortable in my own oddity, learned when not to keep explaining but let the sentence rest. I studied the very short stories of Stuart Dybek, especially in *The Coast of Chicago*, for how each one demands the reader's participation in meaning-making. The ratio of time-spent-reading to time-spent-pondering is delightfully maximized in Dybek's work. I

have long admired the quirky observations, unexpected lists and whimsical changes of tone of Sei Shonagon's *The Pillow Book*. Written one thousand years ago, Shonagon's voice is endlessly fresh to me, endlessly charming. Also, I love the extreme abbreviation of haiku, particularly those of Issa, full of warm humanity and humor, often tinged with pathos (Don't worry, spiders / I keep house /casually.")

Like a painting by Chuck Close, each micro-memoir offers brightly colored swatches of moments that, as the book progresses, combine to present a portrait, in this case, the portrait of a woman as a writer, as a wife, as a mother, and as a participant in the delicious and bizarre human endeavor called life on earth.