

Nanonovels

Jules Horne

TEXTHOUSE

Scotland



For Michael Scott

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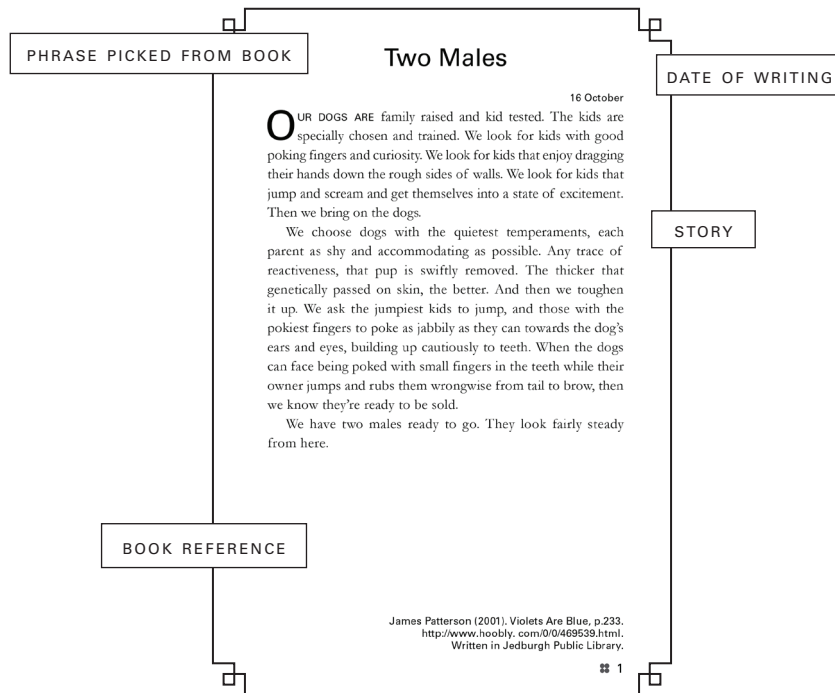
Free will is the sensation of making a choice.
—Brian Greene

NANONOVELS ARE SHORT stories written in five minutes, inspired by a random phrase from a book, followed by a Google search.

I wrote one a day from my birthday on 16th October. The aim was to continue for a year, and see what I could learn about patterns, improvisation and resistance.

The resulting stories capture a time in the early 21st century when we were becoming aware of being powerfully shaped by search engines. It also reflects an early 21st century bookshelf, and a human mind with all its faults, ruts and impulses, paddling through the English language towards a story.

Anatomy Of A Nanonovel



The Steps

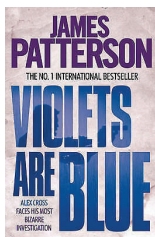
PICK
BOOK



PICK
PHRASE



SEARCH
WEB



"two males"



How To Write A Nanonovel

- Close your eyes.
- Go to bookshelf.
- Blind-choose a book.
- With eyes closed, open book and place a finger on the page.
- Open your eyes.
- Insert the word or phrase you find into Google.

THIS IS THE TITLE OF YOUR STORY

- Open the first non-sponsored page that appears. Something on this page is your stimulus.
- Set a timer and write for **five minutes**.
- Stop.

YOU MUST ALWAYS GO WITH WHAT TURNS UP.
EVEN - ESPECIALLY - IF YOU SPOT ANOTHER,
MORE INTERESTING, PHRASE ON THE PAGE.

Tweaks allowed

You may finish your sentence. You may tidy your spelling and correct your grammar. If you aren't writing at home, you can go to a library and write your story there, using the same rules.

Tweaks not allowed

You may not choose a different book, phrase, web page. Stick with what appears.

Unusual situations

If the book page is blank, use another page.

If the web page doesn't display due to a technical fault, use the 'page cannot be displayed' page.

Findings

You will always smile at the book you find. The web page, on the other hand, will always make you groan.

You will rediscover forgotten books.

You will discover books you have bought but never read.

You will discover books that someone else has bought, and you have never noticed.

You will discover books you have borrowed and forgotten to return.

You will leave rediscovered books lying around the house.

Your bookshelf will become even more disordered.

Evening stories will write themselves differently from morning stories.

Introduction

HAVE YOU EVER suffered from writer's block? If so, you may not know that there's a condition far worse: writer's *lock*.

This is a severe form of writer's block, characterised by *not doing any writing*.

When I began to write these nanonovels, I was suffering from writer's lock.

The condition had persisted on and off for a few months. I was dealing with grief and trying to work through it.

I wanted to write novels, plays, stories. But the enormity of the work froze me into inaction. I'd wait until I had more time, I decided. Till things were quieter.

Of course, this never happened. The months and years were passing by. Writer's lock had a firm grip on my life. There came the point when I realised I wasn't even a writer any more.

Because writers write.

So on my birthday, 16th October, I decided to take things in hand.

Five minutes. That's all I'd do. So ridiculously easy that there could be no excuse.

But what if inspiration didn't strike? I devised a plan:

Stand before bookshelf. Shut eyes. Pick book. Open book and insert finger.

Read the words where your finger lands. This is the title of your story.

Insert these words into Google. Search. Go to the first non-sponsored page.

Something on this page is your stimulus.

Write for five minutes. Then stop. No editing.

For 150 days, I wrote a story a day in five minutes. These are the stories.

Below each story, you'll also find the book and web sources that inspired it.

It's best if you don't read too many nanonovels at once. They need time around them, like poems.

At the end, you'll find the story of how it ended. Along with some thoughts about nanonovels, randomness, writer's block, improv and the creative process in general.

I hope you'll try the experiment and write some nanonovels of your own. You may not have a novel inside you. But you certainly have a nanonovel.

❖ October

Two Males

16 October

OUR DOGS ARE family raised and kid tested. The kids are specially chosen and trained. We look for kids with good poking fingers and curiosity. We look for kids that enjoy dragging their hands down the rough sides of walls. We look for kids that jump and scream and get themselves into a state of excitement. Then we bring on the dogs.

We choose dogs with the quietest temperaments, each parent as shy and accommodating as possible. Any trace of reactivity, that pup is swiftly removed. The thicker the genetically passed on skin, the better. And then we toughen it up. We ask the jumpiest kids to jump, and those with the pokiest fingers to poke as jabbily as they can towards the dog's ears and eyes, building up cautiously to teeth. When the dogs can face being poked with small fingers in the teeth while their owner jumps and rubs them wrongwise from tail to brow, then we know they're ready to be sold.

We have two males ready to go. They look fairly steady from here.

James Patterson (2001). *Violets Are Blue*, p.233.
<http://www.hoobly.com/0/0/469539.html>.
Written in Jedburgh Public Library.

Nourish

17 October

YOU MAY HAVE been trying for a while. You may have been on the brink of giving up many times. You may now be nearing 50, and see trying as an extreme reach of optimism.

The point when extreme optimism becomes delusion is unclear. Look in the mirror. See the wrinkles. That should give you a jolt. What baby wants to look up at her mother's face and see her grandmother's? That's why we've made this cream. It addresses the point where optimism becomes delusion, and shortcuts you straight into disillusion, followed (importantly) by grieving. It's important to mourn your unborn children, as well as the ones you almost had. The fictional children have as great a power to sadden as the ones who nearly made it. They're all milling around, jostling in your head, causing that extreme optimism.

It's a dangerous condition. It stops you getting on with life. You have yours still to live, even if your children don't.

Elizabeth Bishop (1983). *Complete Poems*, p.149.
<http://www.nourish-fertility.com/>

Merv Was Always

18 October

DESPITE HIS WEALTH, Merv was always a regular guy. He ate crispy crunches for breakfast, same as everyone else. The fact he sprinkled them with toasted diamonds was neither here nor there. He drove a tiny, second-hand Lear jet and had a poky mansion in the middle of Beverley Hills, where the neighbours were far too noisy in the night, and the garbage collectors rough and slapdash.

He toughed it out, and kept himself going, same as everyone else, with nights out in the caviar pub and occasional walks along the sides of gated neighbourhoods. He got old, same as everyone else, and bent over slightly, and found his voice more quivery than he felt.

He got to 82 and loved it there, and then died, same as everyone else. And now he lies in the ground, same as everyone else, just with a bigger, diamond-sprinkled headstone that draws jackdaws from far across the county.

David Mitchell (2006). *Black Swan Green*, p.173.
<http://www.thecolumnists.com/jillian/jillianmurcia5.html>