

Does a personal diary constitute creative writing?

The failure to provide a general consensus on what constitutes a diary presents a perhaps inaccurate or unrepresentative generalisation, which in turn may invalidate a diarist's work. Though some believe it to be an extension of one's creativity, others choose to view it as a rather more factual, historical record.

Many recognise the malleability of this genre and its ability to meld a concoction of genres and materials: for instance, "the symbiosis between the documentary and the fictional" (Nemoianu 2003). Likewise, there exists no single avenue to either understanding or developing one's creative writing, due to it being "a highly individualised practice" (Harper 2013). This being so, the purpose and form of the diary is dependent on the unique individual: for example, a diary provided enormous emotional relief and a channel for suppressed creativity and freedom of expression amongst women, under the gender-based constraints of 19th century society (Raoul 1989). One such instance is that of Russian diarist Marie Baashkirtseff, who believed the writing of a diary to simultaneously possess the idea that it would go unread, yet also written with the purpose of being read and confessed, "I write down everything, everything, everything", such as beautifully crafted detailed descriptions of her face and naked body (Wilson 2006). Since one is writing with no secrecy and for oneself, there is no one who can hold them accountable for their lies or untruthful reflection of self. It is instead whatever feels natural for the author, which could be fictitious or imagined rather than a true historical narrative.

Alternatively, Professor Lawrence Rosenwald defines a diary to be 'In form... a chronologically ordered sequence of dated entries addressed to an unspecified audience', which in turn suggests a

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6. M.Popova. *Celebrated Writers on the Benefits of Keeping a Diary*. <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/09/04/famous-writers-on-keeping-a-diary/>
7. I.Paperno. *What Can Be Done With Diaries?* *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4, Wiley on behalf of The Editors and Board of Trustees of the Russian Review (2004)

sense of regimentation in the documentation of daily life (Paperno 2004). Meanwhile, the conversational tone of a diary is often treated as secondary to the more literary and directed memoir. Diarist Anais Nin considered the keeping of a diary to have allowed her to flourish in her creative writing, developing “naturalness and spontaneity” as well as allowing for the translation of “the subjective into the universal” (Popova 2014). Moreover, recent research has suggested a correlation between “enhanced dream recall” through the written recording of dreams, and increased creativity. This implies that a diary, holding a resistance to time, is a creative process documenting the development of self. It allows for the preservation of memories and events which may be drawn on creatively in future; George Orwell maintained multiple diaries- recording pivotal events such as the London Blitz- which would inform his dystopian works, e.g. 1984.

To summarise on that point, the contents of a diary would appear to the reader of the future to be creative writing for, decades on, what was reality for the keeper of the diary seems unimaginable to the reader and therefore fictional. To be a successful diarist, it is necessary to capture one’s present reality in full colour and this requires the skill to write and think creatively in order to express emotion and life to someone who holds to understanding. Whilst others argue that the external circumstances benefit the diarist regardless of their writing capability- such as in the instance of Anne Frank- it stands that there exists no creativity without vulnerability and so it should be said that a personal diary does indeed constitute creative writing.

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