Ever since the ‘interpretive turn’ of the late 1980s (Hirschman, 1989), marketing academics have been expressing themselves in interesting ways (Holbrook, 2016). Commendably imaginative and consistently innovative, these expressions include poetry, painting, film, drama, photography and, of late, socially mediated modes of communication (Schroeder, 2015). Such endeavours, admittedly, rarely ‘count’ for research assessment or career progression purposes. And, of course, they are a drop in the academic ocean compared to conventionally written articles, chapters and textbooks. But a generation on from the interpretive turn (Sherry, 1991), artfully embroidered expressions of marketing scholarship form part of our discipline’s rich tapestry.

Impressive as it is, this upsurge in expressionism is uneven. Some spheres are forging ahead faster than others. Poetry and videography are proving particularly popular, with well-attended film festivals and packed-to-the-rafters poetry slams. Set against this, song cycles, graphic novels and short stories are conspicuous by their absence. The lack of the latter is especially surprising, since the short story is ‘closer’ to the conventional academic article than most. Perhaps it is too close to the case study for comfort. Perhaps it falls foul of reviewers, who expect written works to adhere to canonical academic convention. Perhaps, despite the pioneering endeavours of Schau (2000), Maclaran (2003) and Schouten (2014), it has never been given a chance.

Regardless of the reasons for this neglect, it is incontestable that in the right hands the short story is unrivalled for its power and impact (Boyd, 2006). Anton Chekhov, Somerset Maugham, Katherine Mansfield and Angela Carter are just a few of the masters of this compact yet compelling mode of communication (Newland and Hershman, 2018). At a time when academic articles are more regimented, arguably, than Restoration comedies (Abrams 1993), rewriting research in short story format might provide a stimulating shock to the system. Who are the Alice Munros of marketing scholarship? Who is the Raymond Carver of consumer research? Who, for that matter, is the Saki of service-dominant logic, the Joan Didion of ordinary least squares, the Edgar Allan Poe of the product life cycle? There’s only one way to find out.

This special issue of Marketing Theory invites academics to write a short story based on their research, a work of fiction that captivates those who might otherwise avoid a ‘normal’ article on the subject. Any subject is acceptable, as long as it relates to marketing theory and thought. Any literary genre is welcome (horror, fantasy, sci-fi romance, etc.), albeit the accompanying academic apparatus (of references, hypotheses, models, et al.) is not. Nor, on this occasion, are poems, videos,
screenplays, photo-essays or anything other than ‘classic’ short stories. The shorter the better. Five thousand words maximum. Less is more. Brevity is best.

Reviewing

Setting aside the academic apparatus also applies to the review process. Although all submitted manuscripts will be subject to double-blind review, the evaluative criteria will be based, not on ‘scientific’ expectation, but on ‘literary’ excellence. Specifically, those itemised in the CLAMPS framework of effective storytelling, where C stands for characters, the protagonists; L stands for location, the setting; A for antagonism, conflict, which drives the story; M for the message of, or takeaway from, the narrative; P for the plot, with its beginning, middle and end; and S for surprise, an unanticipated twist in the tale (Brown 2016). In addition, the 3Rs of Relevance (to the marketing discipline), Resonance (with the socio-cultural climate) and Readability (spine-tingling, heart-rending, gut-wrenching or whatever) will be taken into consideration. Manuscripts will be judged on crisp, creative storytelling rather than robust research reportage. On flights of fancy not facts, figures, frameworks and so forth. Theoretical conjectures should be smuggled in not spelled out…

Timescale

The deadline for submission is April 30, 2019. Manuscripts should be submitted, as normal, through the ScholarOne Manuscripts portal https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mtq. Expressions of interest in the Expressions of Interest special issue are of course welcome. Contact either of the guest co-editors, Stephen Brown (sfx.brown@ulster.ac.uk) or Finola Kerrigan (f.kerrigan@bham.ac.uk).

References


