Short Story Study

a critical anthology

Compiled by
A. J. SMITH and W. H. MASON

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With a foreword by
LORD JAMES OF RUSHOLME

Edward Arnold

First published 1961
by Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd
41 Bedford Square
London WC1B 3DQ

Reprinted 1962 (twice), 1963, 1964, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1975
1979

ISBN 0 7131 1406 1

R.P.

FOREWORD

Argue as we may about over-specialization, its reality, its causes, and the steps that we should take to correct it, most of us would agree in encouraging any attempt to induce our pupils both to read more and to read more intelligently. Across the gulfs that are supposed, often wrongly, to divide the scientist from the arts student, one of the most important bridges that we can build is a common enjoyment of a body of good literature. One is, indeed, often tempted to think that if once we have persuaded our pupils to read widely and even to buy books for themselves, the problems of general education are over. This is not, of course, strictly true. Reading can too easily be yet another method of passing the time, as the ubiquity of *Readers Digests* in any railway carriage only too clearly testifies. If reading is to be more than a mild soporific it must contain some element of discrimination and must bring into play an exercise of critical appreciation. The problem for the teacher is to lead his pupil to see that to be aware of what a writer is trying to do, even to make some effort to understand how he does it, does not lessen enjoyment but enhances it.

The editors of this collection of short stories have made, it seems to me, a most successful attempt to solve this problem. The stories that they have chosen can certainly be enjoyed. It is easy to imagine the reader of *Tickets Please* being lured on to tackle *Sons and Lovers*, or even *Paste* being for some member of the science sixth a first step on the glorious pilgrimage to *The Ambassadors*. But something more than passive enjoyment is asked of the reader. The questions asked and the judgments demanded are acute enough to make the reader realize that he must be something more than a recipient, and that reading good literature is an active business, an enterprise demanding more from him than the ability to follow the printed word. I can well imagine senior students finding this anthology an introduction to a world in which distinctions between specialists become meaningless, the world of the intelligent enjoyment of good writing. As the work of two very good teachers of English it should commend itself to

those concerned with the needs of students of very varying kinds. And if those who use the book are stimulated by disagreement with the selection of authors or the comments upon them to make their own anthology and to ask their own questions, then, one feels, the deeper intentions of the compilers will have been fulfilled.

JAMES OF RUSHOLME

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INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK IS intended to meet the need of the teacher of young men and women for recent, or near-recent, writing of quality and maturity, which will at the same time be amenable to intensive tutorial study both in respect of matter and of length. Many such teachers will have realized the possibilities of the short story and sought to use specimens of their own choosing, well beyond the scope of the stock school anthology: the editors have simply brought together some pieces which they for their part have handled with success, in the form in which they would have liked to present them to their pupils. Their hope is that others will find the resultant volume as useful as they themselves would have done.

These stories were originally worked over with groups ranging in special interest from mathematics to English literature, and in type from sixth form to adult education. In general, apart from the obvious desirability of wide variety, four considerations have governed the choice, and the direction of the accompanying matter. They are as follows: the need (*a*) to "provide a bridge" (in Gilbert Highet's phrase) from school or university to the world outside, and from youth to maturity (*b*) to stimulate close and intelligent reading, and to indicate the proper use of literature as a mature discipline (*c*) to afford some understanding of the ground of such literary attitudes as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, pathos, sentimentality, and invite reflection on the wider bearing of these (*d*) to inculcate sound critical approaches, and impart familiarity with the vocabulary, tools, and method of literary criticism. Of course, the best use of the book will be that which keeps all four ends in sight, but it should adequately serve the turn of the tutor who seeks no more than to put before his pupils some representative work of acknowledged masters in this kind.

As regards the method of the book, which might be thought novel, the editors have aimed to carry out a normal teaching programme in rather more detail than would commonly be possible to the class tutor, and in doing so to provide the student with a full apparatus for his own pondering. The ancillary matter is intended not to supply

packaged judgments — God forbid — but to offer the necessary background and equipment for independent inquiry. The commentaries, in particular, may need here and there to be helped out by the teacher; and they will have served some part of their purpose if they occasionally suggest a line of approach to him. Otherwise, the student should gain by a demonstration with readily apprehensible material of what it is hoped may prove — at this level — a fairly rigorous critical scrutiny. But naturally, it is open to a reader to use the editors as whipping-boys or, if he wishes, ignore their intrusions altogether.

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HENRY JAMES

1843-1916

It would not be too much to say that what is most important in the life of Henry James is not the events or even the personal relationships – though these cannot be ignored – but the stages in his conception of the art of writing. For he was a man dedicated to his craft. Quite early in life (James was born in New York in 1843) he felt himself a lonely child, although he had a happy, leisured and cultured home. An injury to his back prevented his serving in the American Civil War and accentuated his feeling that it was not in the world of affairs that he was to find his way of life. In 1870 the death of his beloved cousin Minny Temple at the age of twenty-four deeply affected James, for as he said: "I always looked forward with a certain eagerness to the day when I should have regained my natural lead, and one friendship, on my part, at least, might have become more active and masculine." And so Henry James, whilst always a man who delighted in company – he was one of the great "diners-out" of his day – essentially withdrew into the world of creative writing.

As a boy and as a young man he had travelled in Europe. In 1875 he made the critical decision – to live in Europe: "I have made my choice, and God knows that I have no time to lose." He finally settled at Rye, in Sussex, becoming a naturalized British subject in 1915, some six months before his death in February 1916.

James had begun writing when a young man at the Harvard Law School and his productivity remained remarkable for more than forty years. Novels, stories, travel sketches, criticism, plays (his incursion into drama in the 1890s was grievously unsuccessful) came from him with an ever-deepening subtlety and psychological complexity – a progression that proved too much for many who prefer the relative

straightforwardness of early works like *Roderick Hudson* (1876) to the labyrinthine, yet controlled, intricacy of later novels like *The Golden Bowl* (1904), of which George Sampson writes (*Concise Cambridge History of Literature*) "those who can read it can read everything he wrote".

It is difficult to represent the genius of Henry James by a *short* story for the genre that proved most congenial to his gifts was the "long short story", such as *The Spoils of Poynton*, *The Aspern Papers* or, the best known of all, *The Turn of the Screw*. For what James was seeking, in novel or story, was ever determined by (the phrase is his own) "the law of entire expression". The implications of this ruling concept are manifold. Time and again James tells us of the importance he attached to perceiving the possibilities of a given situation, to letting it work within the mind subject to further and further analysis until "the smothered rapture and the obscure victory" of triumphant achievement. The virtues of James's writing are therefore those of the dedicated artist: exquisite sensibility, moral and psychological, directed by a controlling intelligence that saw form and style as indispensable constituents of that "entire expression" which is the distinguishing feature of his work.

Suggested Reading: *Daisy Miller* (1878); *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881); *The Aspern Papers* (1888); *The Spoils of Poynton* (1896); *The Turn of the Screw* (1898); *The Wings of a Dove* (1902); *The Ambassadors* (1903).

* * *

Paste

"I've found a lot more things," her cousin said to her the day after the second funeral; "they're up in her room — but they're things I wish *you'd* look at."

The pair of mourners, sufficiently stricken, were in the garden of the vicarage together, before luncheon, waiting to be summoned to that meal, and Arthur Prime had still in his face the intention, she was moved to call it rather than the expression, of feeling something or

other. Some such appearance was in itself of course natural within a week of his stepmother's death, within three of his father's; but what was most present to the girl, herself sensitive and shrewd, was that he seemed somehow to brood without sorrow, to suffer without what she in her own case would have called pain. He turned away from her after this last speech – it was a good deal his habit to drop an observation and leave her to pick it up without assistance. If the vicar's widow, now in her turn finally translated, had not really belonged to him it was not for want of her giving herself, so far as he ever would take her; and she had lain for three days all alone at the end of the passage, in the great cold chamber of hospitality, the dampish, greenish room where visitors slept and where several ladies of the parish had, without effect, offered, in pairs and successions, piously to watch with her. His personal connection with the parish was now slighter than ever, and he had really not waited for this opportunity to show the ladies what he thought of them. She felt that she herself had, during her doleful month's leave from Bleet, where she was governess, rather taken her place in the same snubbed order; but it was presently, none the less, with a better little hope of coming in for some remembrance, some relic, that she went up to look at the things he had spoken of, the identity of which, as a confused cluster of bright objects on a table in the darkened room, shimmered at her as soon as she had opened the door.

They met her eyes for the first time, but in a moment, before touching them, she knew them as things of the theatre, as very much too fine to have been, with any verisimilitude, things of the vicarage. They were too dreadfully good to be true, for her aunt had had no jewels to speak of, and these were coronets and girdles, diamonds, rubies and sapphires. Flagrant tinsel and glass, they looked strangely vulgar, but if, after the first queer shock of them, she found herself taking them up, it was for the very proof, never yet so distinct to her, of a far-off faded story. An honest widowed cleric with a small son and a large sense of Shakespeare had, on a brave latitude of habit as well as of taste – since it implied his having in very fact dropped deep into the "pit" – conceived for an obscure actress, several years older than himself, an admiration of which the prompt offer of his reverend name and hortatory hand was the sufficiently candid sign. The response

had perhaps, in those dim years, in the way of eccentricity, even bettered the proposal, and Charlotte, turning the tale over, had long since drawn from it a measure of the career renounced by the undistinguished *comédienne* — doubtless also tragic, or pantomimic, at a pinch — of her late uncle's dreams. This career could not have been eminent and must much more probably have been comfortless.

"You see what it is — old stuff of the time she never liked to mention."

Our young woman gave a start; her companion had, after all, rejoined her and had apparently watched a moment her slightly scared recognition. "So I said to myself," she replied. Then, to show intelligence, yet keep clear of twaddle: "How peculiar they look!"

"They look awful," said Arthur Prime. "Cheap gilt, diamonds as big as potatoes. These are the trappings of a ruder age than ours. Actors do themselves better now."

"Oh now," said Charlotte, not to be less knowing, " actresses have real diamonds."

"Some of them." Arthur spoke drily.

"I mean the bad ones — the nobodies too."

"Oh, some of the nobodies have the biggest. But mamma wasn't of that sort."

"A nobody?" Charlotte risked.

"Not a nobody to whom somebody — well, not a nobody with diamonds. It isn't all worth, this trash, five pounds."

There was something in the old gewgaws that spoke to her, and she continued to turn them over. "They're relics. I think they have their melancholy and even their dignity."

Arthur observed another pause. "Do you care for them?" he then asked. "I mean," he promptly added, "as a souvenir."

"Of you?" Charlotte threw off.

"Of me? What have I to do with it? Of your poor dead aunt who was so kind to you," he said with virtuous sternness.

"Well, I would rather have them than nothing."

"Then please take them," he returned in a tone of relief which expressed somehow more of the eager than of the gracious.

"Thank you." Charlotte lifted two or three objects up and set them down again. Though they were lighter than the materials they imitated

they were so much more extravagant that they struck her in truth as rather an awkward heritage, to which she might have preferred even a matchbox or a penwiper. They were indeed shameless pinchbeck. "Had you any idea she had kept them?"

"I don't at all believe she *had* kept them or knew they were there, and I'm very sure my father didn't. They had quite equally worked off any tenderness for the connection. These odds and ends, which she thought had been given away or destroyed, had simply got thrust into a dark corner and been forgotten."

Charlotte wondered. "Where then did you find them?"

"In that old tin box" – and the young man pointed to the receptacle from which he had dislodged them and which stood on a neighbouring chair. "It's rather a good box still, but I'm afraid I can't give you *that*."

The girl gave the box no look; she continued only to look at the trinkets. "What corner had she found?"

"She hadn't 'found' it," her companion sharply insisted; "she had simply lost it. The whole thing had passed from her mind. The box was on the top shelf of the old schoolroom closet, which, until one put one's head into it from a step-ladder, looked, from below, quite cleared out. The door is narrow and the part of the closet to the left goes well into the wall. The box had stuck there for years."

Charlotte was conscious of a mind divided and a vision vaguely troubled, and once more she took up two or three of the subjects of this revelation; a big bracelet in the form of a gilt serpent with many twists and beady eyes, a brazen belt studded with emeralds and rubies, a chain, of flamboyant architecture, to which at the Theatre Royal, Little Peddlington, Hamlet's mother had probably been careful to attach the portrait of the successor to Hamlet's father. "Are you very sure they're not really worth something? Their mere weight alone – !" she vaguely observed, balancing a moment a royal diadem that might have crowned one of the creations of the famous Mrs Jarley.

But Arthur Prime, it was clear, had already thought the question over and found the answer easy. "If they had been worth anything to speak of she would long ago have sold them. My father and she had unfortunately never been in a position to keep any considerable value locked up." And while his companion took in the obvious force of this

he went on with a flourish just marked enough not to escape her: "If they're worth anything at all – why, you're only the more welcome to them."

Charlotte had now in her hand a small bag of faded, figured silk – one of those antique conveniences that speak to us, in the terms of evaporated camphor and lavender, of the part they have played in some personal history; but, though she had for the first time drawn the string, she looked much more at the young man than at the questionable treasure it appeared to contain. "I shall like them. They're all I have."

"All you have – ?"

"That belonged to her."

He swelled a little, then looked about him as if to appeal – as against her avidity – to the whole poor place. "Well, what else do you want?"

"Nothing. Thank you very much." With which she bent her eyes on the article wrapped, and now only exposed, in her superannuated satchel – a necklace of large pearls, such as might once have graced the neck of a provincial Ophelia and borne company to a flaxen wig. "This perhaps *is* worth something. Feel it." And she passed him the necklace, the weight of which she had gathered for a moment into her hand.

He measured it in the same way with his own but remained quite detached. "Worth at most thirty shillings."

"Not more?"

"Surely not if it's paste?"

"But *is* it paste?"

He gave a small sniff of impatience. "Pearls nearly as big as filberts?"

"But they're heavy," Charlotte declared.

"No heavier than anything else." And he gave them back with an allowance for her simplicity. "Do you imagine for a moment they're real?"

She studied them a little, feeling them, turning them round.

"Mightn't they possibly be?"

"Of that size – stuck away with that trash?"

"I admit it isn't likely," Charlotte presently said. "And pearls are so easily imitated."

"That's just what – to a person who knows – they're not. These have no lustre, no play."

"No – they *are* dull. They're opaque."

"Besides," he lucidly inquired, "how could she ever have come by them?"

"Mightn't they have been a present?"

Arthur stared at the question as if it were almost improper. "Because actresses are exposed – ?" He pulled up, however, not saying to what, and before she could supply the deficiency had, with the sharp ejaculation of "No, they mightn't!" turned his back on her and walked away. His manner made her feel that she had probably been wanting in tact, and before he returned to the subject, the last thing that evening, she had satisfied herself of the ground of his resentment. They had been talking of her departure the next morning, the hour of her train and the fly that would come for her, and it was precisely these things that gave him his effective chance. "I really can't allow you to leave the house under the impression that my stepmother was at *any* time of her life the sort of person to allow herself to be approached – "

"With pearl necklaces and that sort of thing?" Arthur had made for her somehow the difficulty that she couldn't show him she understood him without seeming pert.

It at any rate only added to his own gravity. "That sort of thing, exactly."

"I didn't think when I spoke this morning–but I see what you mean."

"I mean that she was beyond reproach," said Arthur Prime.

"A hundred times yes."

"Therefore if she couldn't, out of her slender gains, ever have paid for a row of pearls – "

"She couldn't, in that atmosphere, ever properly have had one? Of course she couldn't. I've seen perfectly since our talk," Charlotte went on, "that that string of beads isn't even, as an imitation, very good. The little clasp itself doesn't seem even gold. With false pearls, I suppose," the girl mused, "it naturally wouldn't be."

"The whole thing's rotten paste," her companion returned as if to have done with it. "If it were *not*, and she had kept it all these years hidden – "

"Yes?" Charlotte sounded as he paused.

"Why, I shouldn't know what to think!"

"Oh, I see." She had met him with a certain blankness, but adequately enough, it seemed, for him to regard the subject as dismissed; and there was no reversion to it between them before, on the morrow, when she had with difficulty made a place for them in her trunk, she carried off these florid survivals.

At Bleet she found small occasion to revert to them and, in an air charged with such quite other references, even felt, after she had lain them away, much enshrouded, beneath various piles of clothing, as if they formed a collection not wholly without its note of the ridiculous. Yet she was never, for the joke, tempted to show them to her pupils, though Gwendolen and Blanche, in particular, always wanted, on her return, to know what she had brought back; so that without an accident by which the case was quite changed they might have appeared to enter on a new phase of interment. The essence of the accident was the sudden illness, at the last moment, of Lady Bobby, whose advent had been so much counted on to spice the five days' feast laid out for the coming of age of the eldest son of the house; and its equally marked effect was the despatch of a pressing message, in quite another direction, to Mrs Guy, who, could she by a miracle be secured—she was always engaged ten parties deep—might be trusted to supply, it was believed, an element of exuberance scarcely less active. Mrs Guy was already known to several of the visitors already on the scene, but she was not yet known to our young lady, who found her, after many wires and counterwires had at last determined the triumph of her arrival, a strange, charming little red-haired, black-dressed woman with the face of a baby and the authority of a commodore. She took on the spot the discreet, the exceptional young governess into the confidence of her designs and, still more, of her doubts; intimating that it was a policy she almost always promptly pursued.

"Tomorrow and Thursday are all right," she said frankly to Charlotte on the second day, "but I'm not half satisfied with Friday."

"What improvement then do you suggest?"

"Well, my strong point, you know, is *tableaux vivants*."

"Charming. And what is your favourite character?"

"Boss!" said Mrs Guy with decision; and it was very markedly under that ensign that she had, within a few hours, completely