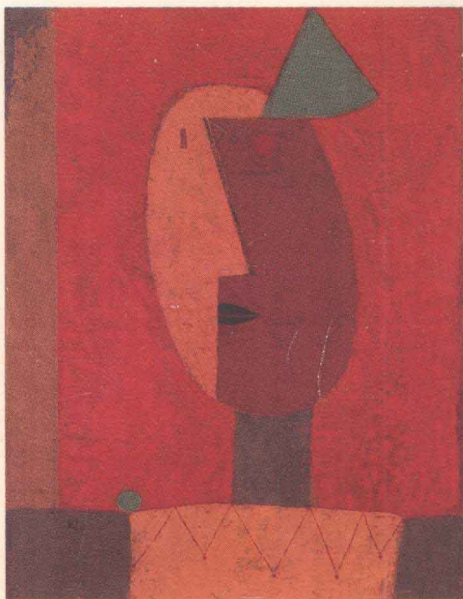
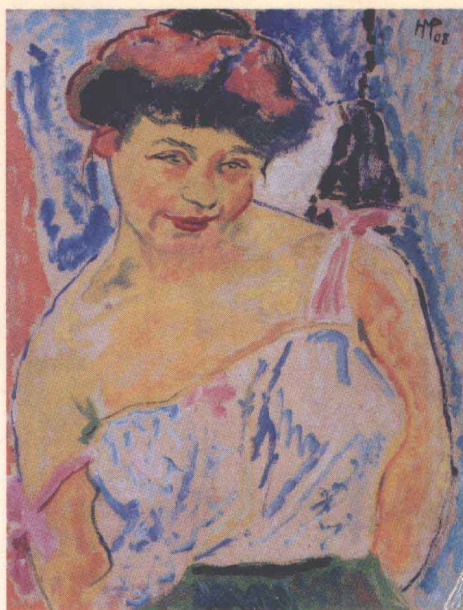


# Fiction's



# Many



# Worlds

*Charles E. May*

# Fiction's Many Worlds

*Charles E. May*

California State University—Long Beach

D. C. HEATH AND COMPANY  
Lexington, Massachusetts Toronto

*Address editorial correspondence to:*

D. C. Heath  
125 Spring Street  
Lexington, MA 02173

Acquisitions Editor: Paul Smith  
Developmental Editor: Linda Bieze  
Production Editor: Carolyn Ingalls  
Designer: Cia Boynton  
Production Coordinator: Chuck Dutton  
Permissions Editor: Margaret Roll

Cover: **Left:** Romare Bearden. *Mother and Child*. 1969. 8½ × 4¼ inches. The Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy ACA Galleries, New York, New York. **Top Right:** *Clown*, Paul Klee. 1929/133 (D3). Oil on Canvas, 26⅜ × 19⅝ in. Private Collection. **Bottom Right:** *Portrait of a Girl*, 1908, Max Pechstein 1881–1955. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz Nationalgalerie. Photo by Jörg P. Anders/Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

For permission to use copyrighted material, grateful acknowledgment is made to the copyright holders listed on pages 829–834, which are hereby considered an extension of this copyright page.

Copyright © 1993 by D. C. Heath and Company.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

Printed in the United States of America.

International Standard Book Number: 0-669-27762-2

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 92-70797

56789-DOC-00 99 98

# | Preface

*Fiction's Many Worlds* is both a short story anthology and a short story textbook. That is, the book includes a large number of stories that readers will find pleasurable and that teachers may teach in any way they see fit, but it also suggests a direction for the study of short fiction that I have found effective and that I hope you will find useful.

## THE STORIES

I have included as many stories as possible, for a book can never contain too many good ones. However, not only are the stories a pleasure to read, they are also highly “teachable,” for they clearly illustrate central characteristics of fiction, and they are thematically and structurally complex enough to encourage close analysis. I have included many frequently anthologized stories, because they have withstood the test of previous teaching; but I have also made room for a number of new stories that represent the renaissance taking place in the short story in the past few years.

The fact that a generous number of the stories in this anthology are quite short is the result of a conscious editorial and pedagogical decision. Although I am sympathetic to a wide range of approaches to fiction—from the thematic to the theoretical—I still believe there is no substitute for a good, close reading of the text. It has been my experience that students are more likely to engage in such a reading if the story is brief enough to permit a close analysis of its structure, language, and thematic implications. It has also been my experience that students learn how to read stories more meaningfully if they have some sense of the shared generic devices of the stories. Reading very short fictions makes it possible for students to consider several stories at once and thus to discover the formal and thematic conventions they have in common.

## EDITORIAL APPARATUS

The Introduction to *Fiction's Many Worlds* consists of two parts: a discussion of Rudyard Kipling's delightful little “Just So” story, “How the Whale Got His Throat,” which emphasizes the crucial differences between events that stories present and the rhetorical nature of the presentation itself; and a comparative discussion of Hemingway's “Hills Like White Elephants” and Patricia Crossman's “A Life to Live,” which illustrates the range of complexity of stories and emphasizes the need for close analysis rather than casual reading.

The 142 stories in the collection are organized into four parts that illustrate the basic “worlds,” or realms of reality, of fiction. The range is from fictions that primarily intend to be clear reflections of everyday reality to those that seem highly stylized and self-reflexive explorations of the nature of story itself. Each group is preceded by a short introduction about the basic characteristics of that “world,” as well as a short analysis of a typical story as an

example of how students might develop their own analyses. Each story is followed by five or six reading prompts or exercises for students to consider. At the end of the book there are definitions of basic critical terms relevant to short fiction, as well as a short biographical note on each author.

#### COMPUTER HYPERTEXT SUPPLEMENT

This book also provides a hypertext computer supplement. A number of the stories have been prepared on computer disks in a hypertext format. Each story in the hypertext format contains idea prompts throughout, which indicate points where the student should pause and examine certain issues, and writing prompts, which ask students to respond to writing ideas. Each story also includes a *Notes* area where students can take notes, as well as a *Draft* area where students can prepare an analytical paper on a single story or group of stories. Students can then move back and forth between the Notes, the Writing Prompts, and the Draft areas, copying material and transferring it as necessary. When they have completed a draft of the paper, students can either print it out or export it to a word processing program where it can be revised, edited, and formatted for submission either on disk or in hard copy.

You can use the hypertext stories for out-of-class reading or writing assignments in which students have their own copy of the stories on disks for use at home or in a campus computer lab. Or, if a computer classroom is available, you may assign a story or group of stories for the entire class to work on at one time. The hypertext format makes it possible for students to read the story, think about it, take notes on it, respond to directed prompts, write a rough draft of a paper, and prepare a final copy without leaving the keyboard. Students report that they enjoy analyzing fiction in this way, for they feel they are truly interacting with the story and making discoveries of their own, rather than giving the work a cursory reading and waiting for the teacher to provide an analysis.

The hypertext stories are available both in HyperCard 2.1 for the Macintosh and in ToolBook 1.5 for IBM compatible machines running Windows 3.0 and higher.

#### INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

The Instructor's Guide that accompanies this book features my own discussions of every story in the text (either individually or in groups that share thematic or formal characteristics), as well as suggestions for further reading on the short story as a genre and the authors represented in the text. If a film version of the story is available, it also is discussed. The Instructor's Guide also includes an essay on the worlds of short fiction, an annotated bibliography on the short story, and alternate tables of contents.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the stimulation and challenge of the hundreds of students who have studied the short story with me over the years at California State University, Long Beach. Neither would it have been possible without the confident support of editor Paul Smith nor the gentle prodding of editor Linda Bieze, both of D. C. Heath. Thanks also to the other wonderful professionals at D. C. Heath, Cia Boynton, Carolyn Ingalls, Toby Levenson, and Margaret Roll, for their expert assistance. Of particular help were those colleagues who read the manuscript and made comments on it: Tony Grooms, The University of Georgia; Alden W. Hart, Slippery Rock University; Donald W. Heidt, College of the Canyons; Dale Kramer, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign; and Joseph Lostracco, Austin Community College. I owe special thanks to my good friend and colleague David Peck at California State University, Long Beach, who keeps me honest.

As always, I am grateful to my wife Pat and my children Hillary, Alex, and Jordan, who provided reassurance when the compilation got complicated, moral support when the task got tedious, and love all the time.

I dedicate this book to my mother Kathleen—whose Cherokee blood, Appalachian heritage, and personal good sense have made her a model of hard work, courage, and determination for me; and to my wife Patricia—whose gentleness, kindness, intelligence and good humor make everything possible.

Charles E. May

# Contents

## Introduction 1

- RUDYARD KIPLING, *How the Whale Got His Throat* 2  
Story and Discourse: “You Must *Not* Forget the Suspenders, Best Beloved” 3
- PATRICIA CROSSMAN, *A Life to Live* 12
- ERNEST HEMINGWAY, *Hills Like White Elephants* 14  
Studying Short Fiction: “A Life to Live” and “Hills Like White Elephants” 18

## PART ONE | *The World of Ordinary Reality* 27

- Metaphor and Morality in Malamud’s “The Loan” 30
- BERNARD MALAMUD, *The Loan* 32
- IRWIN SHAW, *The Girls in Their Summer Dresses* 37
- ROBLEY WILSON, JR., *Thief* 42
- O. HENRY, *The Cop and the Anthem* 44
- EDGAR ALLAN POE, *The Cask of Amontillado* 49
- KATE CHOPIN, *Désirée’s Baby* 55
- BRET HARTE, *Tennessee’s Partner* 59
- JOHN P. DAVIS, *The Overcoat* 66
- ARNA BONTEMPS, *A Summer Tragedy* 70
- CHINUA ACHEBE, *Dead Men’s Path* 77
- NADINE GORDIMER, *The Train from Rhodesia* 80
- HERNANDO TÉLLEZ, *Just Lather, That’s All* 85
- ANTON CHEKHOV, *After the Theatre* 88
- ANTON CHEKHOV, *Misery* 91
- KATHERINE MANSFIELD, *The Fly* 95
- KATHERINE MANSFIELD, *Miss Brill* 99
- JAMES JOYCE, *Eveline* 103
- JAMES JOYCE, *Araby* 107
- SHERWOOD ANDERSON, *Hands* 112
- SHERWOOD ANDERSON, *Paper Pills* 116
- JOHN GALSWORTHY, *The Japanese Quince* 119

ARTURO VIVANTE, <i>Can-Can</i>	122
JOHN UPDIKE, <i>A&amp;P</i>	123
TONI CADE BAMBARA, <i>The Lesson</i>	129
FRANK O'CONNOR, <i>Judas</i>	135
ELIZABETH TAYLOR, <i>The First Death of Her Life</i>	142
ALICE WALKER, <i>To Hell with Dying</i>	144
GRAHAM GREENE, <i>The Innocent</i>	149
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, <i>Theft</i>	152
MARY ROBISON, <i>Yours</i>	158
ROLF YNGVE, <i>The Quail</i>	160
ANN BEATTIE, <i>Janus</i>	163
DAVID LEAVITT, <i>Gravity</i>	168
TILLIE OLSEN, <i>I Stand Here Ironing</i>	171
THOMAS MANN, <i>Railway Accident</i>	178
CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, <i>The Sheriff's Children</i>	184
CARSON McCULLERS, <i>A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud</i>	197
STEPHEN CRANE, <i>The Blue Hotel</i>	203

## PART TWO | *The World of Dream and Hallucination* 225

Meaning and Meaninglessness in Crane's "An Episode of War"	227
STEPHEN CRANE, <i>An Episode of War</i>	230
EUDORA WELTY, <i>A Visit of Charity</i>	233
LUIGI PIRANDELLO, <i>The Soft Touch of Grass</i>	238
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, <i>The Use of Force</i>	242
AMBROSE BIERCE, <i>Chickamauga</i>	245
MONICA WOOD, <i>Disappearing</i>	250
KAY BOYLE, <i>The Astronomer's Wife</i>	252
ELIZABETH BOWEN, <i>The Demon Lover</i>	257
RAYMOND CARVER, <i>Why Don't You Dance?</i>	262
RAYMOND CARVER, <i>Neighbors</i>	266
TOBIAS WOLFF, <i>Say Yes</i>	271
PAMELA PAINTER, <i>The Bridge</i>	275
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, <i>The Long Way Out</i>	277
GAIL GODWIN, <i>A Sorrowful Woman</i>	281



WILLIAM GASS, <i>Order of Insects</i>	286
JAMES PURDY, <i>Why Can't They Tell You Why?</i>	291
EDGAR ALLAN POE, <i>The Tell-Tale Heart</i>	296
FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, <i>The Peasant Marey</i>	301
PÅR LAGERKVIST, <i>Father and I</i>	304
EUDORA WELTY, <i>A Memory</i>	307
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, <i>The Grave</i>	312
YUKIO MISHIMA, <i>Swaddling Clothes</i>	317
RYŪNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA, <i>Rashōmon</i>	321
YASUNARI KAWABATA, <i>The Grasshopper and the Bell Cricket</i>	325
JEAN TOOMER, <i>Theater</i>	328
T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE, <i>Stones in My Passway, Hellhound on My Trail</i>	332
LESLIE SILKO, <i>Yellow Woman</i>	337
TOMMASO LANDOLFI, <i>Wedding Night</i>	344
HEINRICH BÖLL, <i>Across the Bridge</i>	347
CYNTHIA OZICK, <i>The Shawl</i>	351
JOHN STEINBECK, <i>The Snake</i>	355
CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN, <i>The Yellow Wall-Paper</i>	362
WILLIAM FAULKNER, <i>A Rose for Emily</i>	375
JOSEPH CONRAD, <i>The Secret Sharer</i>	382

PART THREE | *The World of Fable, Legend, Allegory, and Myth* 413

“The Masque of the Red Death” as Allegory	416
EDGAR ALLAN POE, <i>The Masque of the Red Death</i>	418
WASHINGTON IRVING, <i>The Adventure of the German Student</i>	423
SEÁN O’FAOLÁIN, <i>The Trout</i>	427
WALTER DE LA MARE, <i>The Riddle</i>	430
LIAM O’FLAHERTY, <i>The Fairy Goose</i>	433
LEO TOLSTOY, <i>The Three Hermits: An Old Legend Current in the Volga District</i>	439
GOTTFRIED KELLER, <i>A Little Legend of the Dance</i>	444
LANGSTON HUGHES, <i>On the Road</i>	448
LAFCADIO HEARN, <i>The Boy Who Drew Cats</i>	452

HERMANN HESSE, <i>The Poet</i>	454
KURT VONNEGUT, JR., <i>Harrison Bergeron</i>	459
URSULA K. LE GUIN, <i>The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas</i>	464
STANISLAW LEM, <i>How the World Was Saved</i>	469
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, <i>Wakefield</i>	473
FLANN O'BRIEN, <i>Two in One</i>	479
ITALO SVEVO, <i>The Mother</i>	483
GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, <i>A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings: A Tale for Children</i>	487
ZORA NEALE HURSTON, <i>Spunk</i>	492
GIOVANNI VERGA, <i>The She-Wolf</i>	497
JOÃO GUIMARÃES ROSA, <i>The Third Bank of the River</i>	500
CHARLES BAXTER, <i>The Cliff</i>	504
ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET, <i>The Secret Room</i>	508
JOHN L'HERUEUX, <i>The Anatomy of Desire</i>	512
DINO BUZZATI, <i>The Falling Girl</i>	515
JULIO CORTÁZAR, <i>The Island at Noon</i>	519
PAUL BOWLES, <i>The Scorpion</i>	524
GEORGE H. FREITAG, <i>An Old Man and His Hat</i>	528
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, <i>Young Goodman Brown</i>	530
JOHN CHEEVER, <i>The Swimmer</i>	540
FRANZ KAFKA, <i>A Country Doctor</i>	549
HERMAN MELVILLE, <i>Bartleby</i>	554

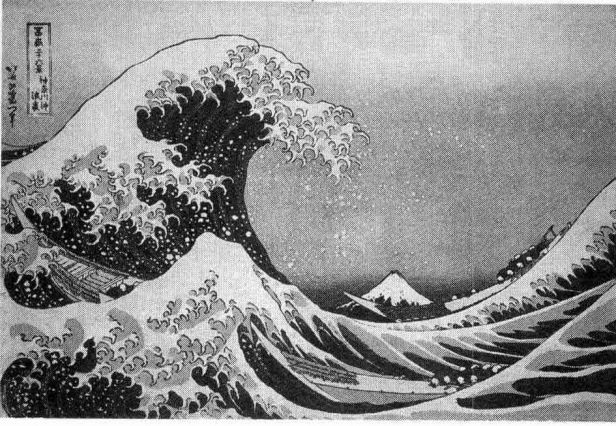
## PART FOUR | *The World of Story* 583

The Power of Story in "The Open Window"	586
SAKI, <i>The Open Window</i>	587
MARK TWAIN, <i>The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County</i>	590
ISAK DINESEN, <i>The Blank Page</i>	595
VIRGINIA WOOLF, <i>The Symbol</i>	599
VLADIMIR NABOKOV, <i>Signs and Symbols</i>	602
DONALD BARTHELME, <i>The Balloon</i>	606
FRANK STOCKTON, <i>The Lady, or the Tiger</i>	610
MARGARET ATWOOD, <i>Happy Endings</i>	615
GRACE PALEY, <i>A Conversation with My Father</i>	618

SPENCER HOLST, <i>On Hope</i>	622
JOHN BARTH, <i>Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction</i>	625
JEAN DE LA FONTAINE, <i>The Grasshopper and the Ant</i>	628
SOMERSET MAUGHAM, <i>The Ant and the Grasshopper</i>	629
TACITUS, <i>The Phoenix</i>	632
OVID, <i>Metamorphosis (Book XV)</i>	633
SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER, <i>The Phoenix</i>	633
JOHN UPDIKE, <i>Pygmalion</i>	638
THE APOCRYPHA, <i>Daniel and Susanna</i>	640
HERBERT GOLD, <i>Susanna at the Beach</i>	643
GENESIS, THE BIBLE, <i>The Flood</i>	649
ROBERT COOVER, <i>The Brother</i>	651
GUY DE MAUPASSANT, <i>In the Moonlight</i>	656
GUY DE MAUPASSANT, <i>Love: Three Pages from a Sportsman's Notebook</i>	660
GUY DE MAUPASSANT, <i>Confessing</i>	664
ISAAC BABEL, <i>Guy de Maupassant</i>	668
ISAAC BABEL, <i>The Sin of Jesus</i>	674
ISAAC BABEL, <i>My First Goose</i>	678
DORIS LESSING, <i>Homage for Isaac Babel</i>	681
DORIS LESSING, <i>Flight</i>	684
DORIS LESSING, <i>Wine</i>	688
SUSAN GLASPELL, <i>A Jury of Her Peers</i>	692
AMBROSE BIERCE, <i>An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge</i>	709
JORGE LUIS BORGES, <i>Funes, the Memorious</i>	716
HENRY JAMES, <i>The Real Thing</i>	721
HENRY JAMES, <i>The Figure in the Carpet</i>	740
The Short Story: Terms and Techniques	767
Biographies of the Authors	789
Acknowledgments	829
Photo Credits	834
Author/Title Index	835

# *Introduction*

Hokusai: *The Great Wave*, 1823–1829



RUDYARD  
KIPLING*How the Whale Got  
His Throat*

On the sea, once upon a time, O my Best Beloved, there was a Whale, and he ate fishes. He ate the starfish and the gar fish, and the crab and the dab, and the paice and the dace, and the skate and his mate, and the mackereel and the pickereel, and the really truly twirly-whirly eel. All the fishes he could find in all the sea he ate with his mouth—so! Till at last there was only one small fish left in all the sea, and he was a small 'Stute Fish, and he swam a little behind the Whale's right ear, so as to be out of harm's way. Then the Whale stood up on his tail and said, "I'm hungry." And the small 'Stute Fish said in a small 'stute voice, "Noble and generous Cetacean, have you ever tasted Man?"

"No," said the Whale. "What is it like?"

"Nice," said the small 'Stute Fish. "Nice but nubbly."

"Then fetch me some," said the Whale, and he made the sea froth up with his tail.

"One at a time is enough," said the 'Stute Fish. "If you swim to latitude Fifty North, longitude Forty West (that is Magic), you will find, sitting *on* a raft *in* the middle of the sea, with nothing on but a pair of blue canvas breeches, a pair of suspenders (you must *not* forget the suspenders, Best Beloved), and a jack-knife, one shipwrecked Mariner, who, it is only fair to tell you, is a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity."

So the Whale swam and swam to latitude Fifty North, longitude Forty West, as fast as he could swim, and *on* a raft, *in* the middle of the sea, *with* nothing to wear except a pair of blue canvas breeches, a pair of suspenders (you must particularly remember the suspenders, Best Beloved), *and* a jack-knife, he found one single, solitary shipwrecked Mariner, trailing his toes in the water. (He had his Mummy's leave to paddle, or else he would never have done it, because he was a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity.)

Then the Whale opened his mouth back and back and back till it nearly touched his tail, and he swallowed the shipwrecked Mariner, and the raft he was sitting *on*, and his blue canvas breeches, and the suspenders (*which* you must not forget), *and* the jack-knife—He swallowed them all down into his warm, dark inside cupboards, and then he smacked his lips—so, and turned round three times on his tail.

But as soon as the Mariner, who was a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity, found himself truly inside the Whale's warm, dark, inside cupboards, he stumped and he jumped and he thumped and he bumped, and he pranced and he danced, and he banged and he clanged, and he hit and he bit, and he leaped and he creeped, and he prowled and he howled, and he hopped and he dropped, and he cried and he sighed, and he crawled and he bawled, and he stepped and he lepped, and he danced hornpipes where he shouldn't, and the Whale felt most unhappy indeed. (*Have you forgotten the suspenders?*)

So he said to the 'Stute Fish, "This man is very nubbly, and besides he is making me hiccough. What shall I do?"

"Tell him to come out," said the 'Stute Fish.

So the Whale called down his own throat to the shipwrecked Mariner, "Come out and behave yourself. I've got the hiccoughs."

"Nay, nay!" said the Mariner. "Not so, but far otherwise. Take me to my natal-shore and the white-cliffs-of-Albion, and I'll think about it." And he began to dance more than ever.

"You had better take him home," said the 'Stute Fish to the Whale. "I ought to have warned you that he is a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity."

So the Whale swam and swam, with both flippers and his tail as hard as he could for the hiccoughs; and at last he saw the Mariner's natal-shore and the white-cliffs-of-Albion, and he rushed half-way up the beach, and opened his mouth wide and wide and wide, and said, "Change here for Winchester, Ashuelot, Nashua, Keene, and the stations of the *Fitchburg Road*"; and just as he said "Fitch" the Mariner walked out of his mouth. But while the Whale had been swimming, the Mariner, who was indeed a person of infinite-resource-and-sagacity, had taken his jack-knife and cut up the raft into a little square grating all running criss-cross, and he had tied it firm with his suspenders (*now* you know why you were not to forget the suspenders!) and he dragged that grating good and tight into the Whale's throat, and there it stuck! Then he recited the following *Sloka*, which, as you have not heard it, I will now proceed to relate—

By means of a grating  
I have stopped your ating.

For the Mariner he was also an Hi-ber-ni-an. And he stepped out on the shingle, and went home to his Mother, who had given him leave to trail his toes in the water; and he married and lived happily ever afterward. So did the Whale. But from that day on, the grating in his throat, which he could neither cough up nor swallow down, prevented him from eating anything except very, very small fish; and that is the reason why whales nowadays never eat men or boys or little girls.

The small 'Stute Fish went and hid himself in the mud under the Door-sills of the Equator. He was afraid that the Whale might be angry with him.

The Sailor took the jack-knife home. He was wearing the blue canvas breeches when he walked out on the shingle. The suspenders were left behind, you see, to tie the grating with; and that is the end of *that* tale.

STORY AND DISCOURSE: "*You Must Not Forget the Suspenders, Best Beloved*"

Rudyard Kipling's simple little children's story about how the whale got his throat illustrates a basic characteristic of fiction worth keeping in mind—that stories are always told, either orally or in writing, by someone. Although this

may seem obvious when stated straightforwardly, frequently we get so caught up in the story that we respond to the events as if they were happening right now rather than as the narration of events that occurred in the past.

Although losing ourselves in a story is necessary for our enjoyment of it "as if" it were a "real" series of events, such total involvement does not usually permit us to understand the story as a language-created event. As the language of the story encourages us to create visual images of the events in our mind, the language itself disappears. As we become caught up in the apparent dynamic action of the event, we lose sight of the teller who controls that action with words. "How the Whale Got His Throat" cleverly reminds us of the control of the teller.

Kipling's *Just So Stories* illustrates an underlying impulse of story-telling as old as the human imagination itself—the need to account for things. The most primitive means by which human beings tried to account for phenomena they did not understand was to create a story that provided a plausible explanation. Such stories, now called "myths," were actually like scientific theoretical models, the value of which is that they provide a unified explanation. Such a myth is "true" not necessarily because it "corresponds" to the facts of the phenomena, but because it is "coherent"; that is, the myth incorporates all the elements of the phenomena, and it holds together.

Kipling's whimsical story explanation of how the whale got his throat begins in the familiar fairy-tale way "once upon a time" and thus establishes the events of the story as having taken place in the past—not a specific time in the past as an historical account might assert, but rather an indeterminate time in some generalized distant past. However, as soon as we begin reading or hearing the story, we forget that the events exist in the past and begin to imagine them taking place in the present. This illusion of the presentness of the past begins to assert itself particularly when events are dramatized, for example, when the whale stands upon his tail and says (and we see and hear him say it), "I'm hungry." As the story continues, we become further caught up in the events as if they are happening before our eyes "now" just as they happened "then." In fact, the concept of "then" disappears, and we are only aware of the illusion of "now."

We follow the events, one thing after another, driven by the desire to see what happens next. However, if we think about it, this very desire is a contradiction in terms, for whatever happens "next" in a story has already happened. What we are experiencing is a written account of the event, a fact that Kipling cleverly keeps in front of us every time he tells us that we must not forget the suspenders. The effect of this teasing remark is to remind us that there is a teller. Of more importance, by telling us *not* to forget something that seems to have no significance, he reminds us of an important difference between the teller and the listener—that the teller knows the significance of the suspenders before we do because the events of the story have taken place prior to the telling of it. This means that the beginning of the story (as told) has embedded within it the end of the story (as a series of events).

Although this may sound quite obvious, it is a fact that as readers we forget in order to become involved in the action of the story. One of the most important implications of this fact is that stories always have two time frames—the time the events took place and the time the story is being related. Film director Mel Brooks plays with this concept in his movie *Space Balls*, a parody of George Lucas's *Star Wars*. At one point in *Space Balls*, Helmet, the character who parodies the villain Darth Vader, and the enemy ship's captain are trying to determine the whereabouts of the heroes by looking at a radar screen. The captain suggests that they take a look at the film *Space Balls* to find them. He explains that as a result of new technology, the home-video version of the film is made available even while the theater release is still being made. After they put the tape on the VCR, they fast-forward to a point in the film identical to the point in the film we are watching. Thus Helmet sees himself on the tape just as the viewer sees him, except now the viewer sees Helmet seeing himself.

Obviously puzzled, Helmet looks at himself in the monitor and then looks out at us; looking back at the monitor, he waves his hand as one might do in front of a mirror or in front of a camcorder. This bit of dialogue follows:

HELMET: What the hell am I looking at? When does this happen in the movie?

COMMANDER: Now. You're looking at "now," sir. Everything that happens now is happening now.

HELMET: What happened to "then"?

COMMANDER: We're past that.

HELMET: When?

COMMANDER: Now. We're at "now" now.

HELMET: Go back to "then."

COMMANDER: When?

HELMET: Now!

COMMANDER: Now?

HELMET: Now!

COMMANDER: I can't.

HELMET: Why?

COMMANDER: We missed it.

HELMET: When?

COMMANDER: Just now.

HELMET: When will "then" be "now"?

COMMANDER: Soon.

HELMET: How soon?

At this point, the scene on the monitor shifts to the heroes trudging through the sand on another planet. The radar operator sitting at the monitor says, "Sir, we have identified their location."



Helmet is so thoroughly confused as to the nature of his existence in time that he does not know where he is in space either.

HELMET: Where?

RADAR OPERATOR: It's the moon of Vega.

COMMANDER: Good work. Set a course and prepare for our arrival.

HELMET: When? (*In complete hysteria*)

COMMANDER: 1900 hours. By high noon tomorrow they will be our prisoners.

HELMET: Who? (*shouting in panic just as his helmet visor drops down and covers his face*)

Mel Brooks is obviously satirizing the speed at which commercial movies get released on home video nowadays, but in so doing, he also makes clear a crucial fact about narrative fiction—there is always a gap between the time of the events as they took place and the time of the relation of those events.

During our first encounter with a story, we are inevitably more caught up with the time frame of the action than with the time frame of the telling of it, for if the story catches our interest, we are eager to see what happens next, allowing ourselves to forget that the actual event has already occurred in its entirety. The Nobel Prize-winning South American writer Gabriel García Márquez has one of his characters say, “Stories only happen to those who know how to tell them.” What this means is that we can never get a replication of the events as they actually took place in the world; we can only “know” those events as narrated by someone else. And indeed when the events are narrated by one who knows how to tell them, what we get is a story.

A basic difference between the events as they might have taken place in the real world and the events as they are narrated is that in the narration we get only a “selection” of the events. If you tried to tell the story of your current day in every single minute detail that occurred, as well as to convey all the thoughts, feelings, and impressions you might have felt as they occurred, you would probably never be able to finish telling it. Consequently, when we tell a story, we select some items to tell and filter out others. Think of being at a party and meeting someone who interests you. Even though there might be lots of noise from other people around you, you would probably focus on the person who has your interest so that you would not even hear what else is going on around you. Similarly, when you tell a story, you select some details and ignore others based on some principle of interest.

Moreover, when someone tells a story, the sequence of the events as told may vary from the sequence of the events as they actually occurred. Instead of telling the event one item after another in time, a teller might skip ahead to some point or, forgetting something, might skip back to a previous point. Or the teller might organize the narration around some central impression or interest, narrating the events that seem related to that impression or interest, regardless of how the events followed each other in time. When we tell a story,