

JAMES B. HALL  
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# The Realm of Fiction

74 SHORT STORIES



Third Edition

*THE REALM  
OF FICTION  
74 Short Stories*

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*THE REALM  
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## Preface

Twelve years since first publication this third edition of the *Realm of Fiction* continues as a coherent anthology which suggests in detail and in broad outline the development and future state of the short story. Using the sturdy chronological framework of prior editions but modifying the formal divisions of the book to three sections, the text continues by specific stories to suggest a literary history of the form. Three main sections—Early Masters; Modern Masters; and New Voices, New Visions—draw alike from Europe, Great Britain, and the United States, with an increased emphasis on modern and contemporary accomplishments. Authors are grouped according to their national origin, usually in order of their date of birth. A useful birth/death chart is included at the back of the book.

With the formal divisions of the third edition now more flexible, there is also a greater range and a greater diversity among the seventy-four stories. All stories were selected with the intention of helping the student to recognize literary quality in short fictions—and by extension—in all literature. At the same time, the student also should understand that the dimensions, the definitions of the form are changing and are presently pushing far beyond previously recognized frontiers.

As one indication of the thorough revision of the earlier text, the editors note that of the present seventy-four stories, forty are new selections. Of these, twenty-three are by authors not previously represented including,



among others: Trollope, Garland, Wharton, Pirandello, Moravia, Pritchett, Lessing, Faulkner, Hemingway, Welty, and Clark. In addition, stories by seventeen previously included authors have been changed in order that they may be represented by work which is more memorable, more fresh, less heavily anthologized.

For the first known time in a short-story anthology intended primarily for the classroom, *Realm of Fiction* presents outstanding examples from two kinds of popular short fiction: stories of crime detection and science fiction. With their well-defined traditions and wide international appeals, these subgenres may have become more representative of literature of our age than many critics presently allow. Masters of these genres here included for the first time are: Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, Isaac Asimov, Ilya Varshavsky, and J. G. Ballard.

Another distinctive feature of the third edition is the inclusion of stories of high literary quality which are also humorous in tone. A great many stories of all nations dramatize tragic situations, isolation, death; far fewer stories of literary quality occur in which the artists's attitude toward the materials produces a comic tone. The editors, therefore, include several new stories which show the comic, the farcical, the satirical possibilities of short fiction. To cite American writers only as cases in point, the editors direct attention to the stories by: O. Henry, Faulkner, Hughes, Malamud, Hall, and Sondheim.

Since the publication of the first edition in 1965, the outer limits of the short-story form have been extended so far and are so unpredictably startling that today many readers may have difficulty in recognizing examples of the form itself; a number of these "extreme," innovative stories—perhaps they should be called "presentations"—are included in *New Voices*, *New Visions*. With slight structure, little characterization, and no recognizable setting—in fact with few or none of the conventional elements of fiction—these presentations approach a pure state of nonverbal expression. For examples, see the work of Lars Görling (Sweden) and Peter Handke (West Germany). Along with these extreme stories are others of apparently more conventional techniques but which may exploit language in unusual ways, treat materials once "taboo," or present motifs and symbols not easily categorized.

In this edition, the new translation by Ben T. Clark from the Russian of Chekhov's "Gusev" joins several previous, original translations done especially for *Realm of Fiction*. The editors regret that the Peter Gontrum translation of Hesse's "The Poet" must be dropped from this edition because of copyright considerations.

As in the two prior editions, except for short biographical notes on each author with references for further reading, this text omits pedagogical

apparatus which may come between the reader and a more direct experience of a story.

The dual editorship of the third edition represents accurately a true collaborative effort: virtues, errors of omission, of fact, of judgment equally to be shared.

Our work is done. The book is yours.

*James B. Hall*

*Elizabeth C. Hall*

# *Introduction*

The short prose narrative is at once the oldest of literary forms and among the latest to receive modern definition. In its primitive state, perhaps of necessity, the prose tale was orally expressed: to entertain an audience few of which could read or write; to chronicle history or miracles believed; or even to prophesy the future. These uses of the prose tale performed a function of value to a tribe, a race, a king, and thus some prose tales survived. A few have become the literary heritage of nations. Only about 150 years ago, in widely separated countries, such literary artists as Hoffman, Mérimée, Tolstoy, Poe, and Hawthorne began to transform the eighteenth-century prose tale into an exacting, complex art form. Among other reasons, this transformation was possible because of the development of high-speed presses, newer means of book and magazine distribution, an audience more complexly educated to recognize and to value literature as a fine art. Today the short story is still in the process of dynamic change.

Of all literary art forms, the short story is the most deceptive. Its traditional focus on a single episode, its relative lack of mass—of density of character, variety of scene, and richness of detail—and its frequently casual tone all seem to suggest ease of composition, at least to the inexperienced reader. In contrast to the panorama of the novel, the short story must strike the unwary reader as an art of limited means, of modest resources. Actual-



ly, the apparent limitations of the form are a measure of its strength: all materials must come under strict artistic management or the overall effect is lost. Very possibly the deceptive nature of the short story is one reason for its evident, wide appeal; for given conscious artists and more sophisticated audiences, the form quickly became a worldwide institution. In the twentieth century the continued fecundity of short fiction is a striking fact of literary history.

The transmutation of the older prose tales into the modern short story is not difficult to understand in broad outline. The oldest known tale, *The Shipwrecked Sailor* (from Egyptian papyri, about 4000 B.C.), or the Book of Jonah (from the Old Testament, 350 to 750 B.C.), or tales from the *Decameron* (1353 A.D.) are not very different in overall literary quality from the eighteenth-century tales which immediately preceded the short story. The latest ancestors of the modern short story are fictional essays, such as "The Vision of Mirza" by Addison in the *Spectator* (1711) or digressions within a novel, such as "The Tale of the Old Man of the Hill" in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1748). Typically, these short prose pieces lack restraint, or an economy of means; either the moral point is obtrusive and thus the artistic effect is thin, or they lack a significant plot structure, and are thus merely discursive, flat. Very possibly, the greatest difference between the older prose tale and the more recent nineteenth-century short story is a consciousness of technique on the part of later artists. Precisely this awareness and a commitment to short fiction as a demanding, distinctive art form mark Hawthorne and Poe as literary pioneers of great importance. In particular, Poe felt that the crucial element in the short story was unity of effect—this effect coming from the artistic combination of "incident" and most especially "tone." Poe was speaking of this necessary unity when he praised Hawthorne's stories by saying, "Every word *tells*, and there is not a word which does *not* tell. . . ." Other American and European writers shared an equally lofty concept of the short story as an art form and thus pointed the way for the short story of the twentieth century.

Compressed statement, the embodiment of significance at several levels of meaning, distinguishes modern short stories of the highest quality. To convey multiple meanings, the artist frequently employs language which is metaphorical, figurative; by definition this kind of language is richly connotative, allusive, freighted with suggestion. The story which is resourceful in its exploitation of language will most gracefully support symbolic detail and symbolic actions; in fact, the use of symbolism, justified by an adequate language, is the most interesting and useful advance in narrative technique of modern times. Because of heightened language many short stories approach poetry in intensity. Even in other contemporary examples wherein the tone remains casual, the action undramatic, the characterization minimal, the writer's major concern remains complexity with control.

Nor does this imply that the modern writer ignores entirely the established, received conventions of the form. As a matter of course the present-day short story comments on the quality, the nature of life; where moral issues are a factor, the artist recognizes that the implied, the suggested is always more moving, more effective, than an easy precept easily formulated. In a like manner, character (imaginative characterization) continues in importance; now, however, the focus of narration may be on the mind or on the psychic states of the protagonists. Plot structure (the largest unit of composition) is more clearly recognized as an integral part of meaning; details are rigorously selected to "tell." Although a story may have literal, allegorical, symbolical, and mythical levels of meaning, this does not imply merely an intellectual exercise, a puzzle posed by the artist and to be "solved" by an adept reader. Although close reading of a story is a useful prelude to a fuller appreciation or to the rendering of critical judgment, the story's intention and the responsible author's intention remain unchanged: to create a unified artistic statement which may give both knowledge and pleasure.

If the modern story has moved toward complexity, there is little cause for regret. After all, the influences on short fiction are of a scientific age, of a magnificently complex world in part described by Darwin, Marx, and Freud. In that world we live. If the literary artist is to render truthfully the present circumstances of life, he or she must impose new demands on the form. In any event the short story is no exception, for the identical situation prevails at the present time in all imaginative writing: in the novel, poetry, and drama.

Each in its own way, the stories in this book describe a specific vision of a complex world. In "The Last Judgment" Karel Čapek reexamines a received notion of an all-powerful God; "Check!," by the Polish author Slawomir Mrozek, dramatizes in terms of a bizarre game of chess the relationship—or lack thereof—of man to some "higher" power. Seen together, the stories bring a new kind of focus to the age-old relationship of man to—shall we say—his God. Other stories raise similar questions about the nature of the human experience, the conflicts of man and nature, or of man with the most powerful antagonist, himself. All literature, including short fiction, is read with the faith that posing such dramatic situations is the first step to a more comprehensive understanding of art, of the world, and of the self.

The concluding section, *New Voices, New Visions*, presents recent developments in short fiction in America and abroad. Certain stories are of a middle range of experience, the conventions almost totally familiar; in contradistinction, others rely on the extremes of technique and vision and are thus abstract and all but nonverbal in expression. Taken together, these concluding seventeen stories affirm a continued viability of the genre. Vital-

ity, however, may be expressed in reaction *from* something: for example, the abstract fictions by Göring and Handke react against the traditional values associated with scale and with depicting “real” life; the pieces by Borges, Varshavsky, Mrozek, and Hughes deny naturalistic conventions in favor of fantasy, the dream, the visionary. The story by Robbe-Grillet denies the value of analysis, of process in fiction; the story by Sondheim is without event, and the absurd dominates any implied rationality. The works by Rosenfeld, Hall, and Ballard render an extreme vision of what is an extraordinary but still “recognizable” world.

As to the significance of the stories which make up the final section of the book, probably it is too soon after the event of composition to judge the permanency of either the trends or the individual works. Beyond doubt, however, these stories confirm certain facets of very real conditions in present society: the recurrence of despair, frustration, doubt; the prevalence of terror, the absurdity of daily occurrences, the futility of seeking absolute answers in an unstable society of shifting moral values. By being true to both the positive and the negative implications of modern life, the short-story artist fulfills his or her own most admirable calling.

If education is the attainment not only of knowledge but also of wisdom concerning the world and ourselves, the short-story form in all its manifestations provides one useful means to that end.

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*EARLY MASTERS*



*Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) was born in Moscow, the son of an autocratic, impoverished nobleman, a resident physician at a hospital for the indigent. Dostoevsky's mother died when he was fifteen, and he was sent to a St. Petersburg school for military engineering. During this time, his father was murdered by his own serfs, and Dostoevsky developed epilepsy, from which he suffered for the remainder of his life. In 1849, he was sentenced to death for being an ancillary member of a revolutionary group; melodramatically, at the last moment, his sentence was revoked; he was, instead, exiled by the Czar to Siberia for ten years. Eventually Dostoevsky returned to St. Petersburg, where he lived in extreme poverty and suffered great personal tragedy; nevertheless, he continued to write some of his great masterpieces, most notably Crime and Punishment (1866) and The Brothers Karamazov (1880). For further reading: White Nights and Other Stories (translated by Constance Garnett, 1918).*

## FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

### *A Christmas Tree and a Wedding*

The other day I saw a wedding . . . but no! Better I tell you about the Christmas tree. The wedding was nice; I enjoyed it very much, but the other thing that happened was better. I do not know why, but while looking at the wedding, I thought about that Christmas tree. This was the way it happened.

On New Year's Eve, exactly five years ago, I was invited to a children's party. The host was a well-known businessman with many connections, friends and intrigues, so you might think the children's party was a pretext for the parents to meet each other and to talk things over in an innocent, casual and inadvertent manner.

I was an outsider. I did not have anything to contribute, and therefore I spent the evening on my own. There was another gentleman present who had no special family or position, but, like myself, had dropped in on this