

The Story and Its Writer

AN INTRODUCTION TO SHORT FICTION

Third Edition



Ann Charters

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THE STORY AND ITS WRITER

An Introduction to Short Fiction

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PREFACE

It is only the story . . . that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather, it is the story that owns us.

Chinua Achebe
Anthills of the Savannah

The Story and Its Writer grew out of my desire to teach from an anthology filled as much as possible with writer talk about short stories, after years of dissatisfaction using textbooks filled with too much editor talk. The books available tended to be of two types: textbooks with a limited number of stories and a bothersome, often prescriptive, abundance of editorial material; or large anthologies with many stories and very little discussion by anyone about matters sure to be perplexing to students. The first type made the editor the authority; the second type made the teacher assume that role. In neither case were those most qualified to speak about fiction — the storytellers — given space to express *their* authority about their craft. *The Story and Its Writer* seeks to redress these imbalances. The gratifying success the book has enjoyed over two editions confirms the appeal and usefulness of its premise.

Those looking for an abundance of good fiction will find more in *The Story and Its Writer* than any similar anthology currently offers: 115 stories in this edition, arranged alphabetically by author. The stories range from classic tales by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe through modern masterpieces by Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner to contemporary selections from the work of writers such as Raymond Carver, Louise Erdrich, and Gloria Naylor. The sheer number and variety of stories should offer plenty of choice and teaching flexibility.

Editorial material is amply provided as well, but all of it is designed to support students without getting in the way of their reading. Most of the editor talk is packed discreetly at the back of the book, to be consulted when appropriate, if appropriate. It includes a history of the short story, an outline of the elements of fiction, an extensive section on writing about fiction, and a glossary of more than 100 literary terms. The stories themselves appear with substantial biographical headnotes, but no other apparatus that might constrain a student's response — no interpretive introductions, no directive questions or assignments.

Those interested in more editor talk may want to examine the instructor's manual. *Resources for Teaching The Story and Its Writer* contains discussions of each story, questions and writing assignments for students, short bibliographies, a thematic index of the stories, a chronological guide to authors and stories in the anthology, and a listing of short stories on film.

Finally, the most distinctive feature of *The Story and Its Writer* is the section of commentaries that immediately follows the anthology of stories. These commentaries — 59 in this edition — justify the title of the book. In most of the commentaries, writers discuss their stories and the stories of fellow writers that appear in the anthology, and more generally remark on the form of the story and vocation of storyteller. I, and the many instructors who have used the first and second editions, find these commentaries to be just the ingredient to stimulate class discussion and give rise to lively writing.

New to This Edition

The Story and Its Writer has grown significantly, with more stories and more commentaries than ever before. Those familiar with the book from earlier editions will notice that the representation of women writers, contemporary American and minority writers, and especially international writers, both Western and non-Western, is much increased. All told, the 115 selections are about equally divided between "classic stories by classic writers" and fine, fresh stories that may someday make — or perhaps break — that canon. The number of commentaries has grown by about a third to fifty-nine, and includes for the first time commentaries by eleven literary critics, reading individual stories from different critical perspectives (structuralist, psychological, feminist, and eight others). In sampling these perspectives, students may learn something about how to deploy, in their reading and writing, the strategies of various critical schools. Also for the first time, the stories and commentaries are arranged alphabetically by author, so it should be much easier in this edition to find one's way through *The Story and Its Writer*. (Those interested in chronology will find a chronological listing of stories by author in the instructor's manual.)

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the help of many people in the preparation and revision of the anthology and the instructor's manual. My colleagues in the English Department at the University of Connecticut — William Sheidley (who wrote the manual with me and my graduate assistants Martha Ramsey and S. J. Estes), Lee Jacobus, Barbara and William Rosen, Compton Rees, William Curtin, Milton Stern, Jack Davis, Jack Manning, Michael Meyer, David Benson, and Feenie Ziner — generously contributed suggestions and advice at every stage of the preparation. The staff at the Homer Babbidge Library, especially Leanne Pander, Pamela Skinner, David McChesney, and Carol Abramson, gave unflagging assistance. Students in my short-story classes diligently drafted the sample essays illustrating the various ways to write about stories. Charles Flynn of the Rockefeller Library and Emily Meideros and Clare Durst of the Dean of the College Office at Brown University were also particularly helpful.

In preparing the third edition of *The Story and Its Writer*, I am especially grateful to my intelligent and resourceful editor, Stephen Scipione, whose assistance was invaluable. My publisher, Charles Christensen, was an untiring source of suggestions and practical advice. Others at Bedford Books who helped with this edition include associate publisher Joan Feinberg, managing editor Elizabeth Schaaf, Jane Betz, Laura McCready, Frank Dumais, Susan M. S. Brown, Virginia Creeden, and especially editorial assistant Ellen Kuhl and my conscientious production editor, Mary Lou Wilshaw. Last, but by no means least, I want to thank my husband, Samuel Charters, and my daughters, Mallay and Nora, for their encouragement during the preparation of all three editions of this book.

Ann Charters
Storrs, Connecticut

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