

# The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction

RICHARD BAUSCH • R.V. CASSILL



SHORTER SEVENTH EDITION

*The*  
NORTON  
ANTHOLOGY  
*of*  
SHORT  
FICTION

SHORTER SEVENTH EDITION

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## PREFACE

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R. V. Cassill—“Verlin” to friends and family—always said that the first principle for composing an ideal fiction anthology is to “fill it with stories that discriminating readers have liked most.” That idea is no less true today, even in a climate of such thoroughgoing moral and aesthetic relativism as this one. An anthologist decides and acts on faith that what moves him deeply will move others the same. That isn’t the final word, though, since the present volume is a teaching anthology and since, as Verlin always said, teaching is a collective enterprise. Consequently, the anthologist must rely heavily on the judgments and opinions of many others, all teachers, who are presently engaged in the great work of teaching the short story to new generations of readers.

I first picked up *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction* because I saw that it was edited by a writer of stories whose work I respected and admired, and wanted to emulate if I could. I believe that has always been one of the greatest strengths of the anthology through the years—that its editor was a practicing writer of stories, and a teacher as well. I never dreamed then, of course, that one day I would work with him, and call him friend. The fact that I was granted the privilege of working with him on only one edition, the Sixth, is a source of sorrow to me; and even so, I could not have foreseen how much I would miss him while putting this edition together.

This Shorter Seventh Edition of the anthology that Verlin created still bears his stamp, as it should. In a way, the work of *continuing* is what I have been about—that is, I have sought to keep everything that seemed right in terms of the stated purposes and themes of the anthology from the beginning. I have attempted to preserve what has stood forth most strongly in the storms of change and the whims of fashion—those stories whose hold on us persists. Where I have perceived—and others have suggested—the necessity for changes, I have sought to make them. All this was done with the aid of the remarks, comments, and preferences expressed by a great many college teachers around the country, all of whom cheerfully contributed to the enterprise.

What I wanted more than anything in my work on this edition was to keep the anthology representative of the variety and richness of the short story form, and to do so with an eye to aiding college-level teaching of those stories. One hopes that by offering a wide selection of work, old and new, one might help students begin the real search—the pursuit of what John Updike called “the human news,” in the world’s literature. It is all about pleasure, this particular field of study, and it is pleasure that, in the end, makes us more free—because it teaches us to look upon the particulars, the details of a moment, lived and remembered.

## *Features Of The Shorter Seventh Edition*

—The Shorter Seventh Edition now offers 72 stories by 67 authors; 7 more stories than its predecessor. Twenty-two of the stories and 15 of the authors are new to this edition.

—Because students benefit from exposure to more than one work by an author, I have increased to 5 the number of authors represented by more than one story. William Faulkner, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, D. H. Lawrence, and Flannery O'Connor are represented by more than one work in this edition.

—The “Writers on Writing” section has been expanded to include 26 essays, interviews, letters, and other statements by writers about the art and craft of fiction. This affords students a look at the craft from the inside, and may indeed be a spur for young writers to attempt it themselves.

—New to the Seventh Edition is a “Reviews and Commentaries” section that offers 16 pieces of commentary about stories included in the anthology. Even as they are just beginning to study and appreciate short fiction, many students are asked to write criticism—a daunting task, since there is a language, a means of discourse, in critical writing that is quite distinctive. The “Reviews and Commentaries” section provides students with a few models of intelligent and perceptive commentary to help them assume the stance and find the language and means for their own critical work.

—The Seventh Edition has been completely redesigned to be more readable and visually appealing. To satisfy students' natural curiosity about the writers they're reading, each biographical headnote is now accompanied by a photograph or portrait of the author.

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## WRITING ABOUT FICTION

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The American poet and translator John Ciardi used to be fond of telling a story about going around to schools and speaking to groups of students as part of a poets-in-the-schools program. The idea was and is a good one: to expose young people to writers, the actual practitioners of the craft or art. One morning, as Ciardi would tell it, he was scheduled to visit an elementary school, so he brought along a poem he had written for children called “The Stranger Inside the Pumpkin.” The poem begins like this:

The stranger inside the pumpkin said,  
“It’s only dark inside your head.”

After he had read the poem aloud to a crowded room of fifth graders, he asked, “Who’s speaking in this poem?” Every hand in the room went up, and he chose a girl in front who, without the slightest hesitation, said, “Jack O’Lantern.” Ciardi then asked, “What is Jack O’Lantern telling us?” Again, there was a clamor to get his attention, hands waving, little voices saying, “Me, me.” Ciardi chose a boy this time. “Jack O’Lantern thinks we don’t have any light inside us because there’s no candle showing out our eyes,” the boy said. And after this, the whole class began to talk about the truth, or lack of it, in that idea. There was even some talk about the quality of light, ordinary candlelight as opposed to the light of imagination.

At the end of the session, as Ciardi and his escort were leaving the school, the escort said, “There’s a high school nearby, we have some extra time, would you mind visiting with a class there?”

Ciardi felt slightly ill-prepared, because all he had with him was this children’s poem, “The Stranger Inside the Pumpkin.” But he agreed to visit the high school, deciding that he would simply read the same poem, and talk about writing children’s poems. To a large group of twelfth graders—young men and women, really—he read those same lines:

The stranger inside the pumpkin said,  
“It’s only dark inside your head.”

When he finished reading, he asked the same question he had asked the fifth grade children. “Who’s speaking in this poem?”

Silence.

He waited, intending—as he put it, telling the story—to keep waiting until the sun went down if it took that long, for someone, anyone, to gather the courage to speak. Finally one brave young man in the back of the room raised his hand. “Yes?” Ciardi said.

“Is that, symbolism?”

Ciardi would go on to say that it had taken a mere seven years of schooling to reduce this young reader to that level of stupidity about the written word.

Now, of course, this is a story, and John Ciardi used it with delight, and to great effect, as an illustration of how students learning to think critically about what they read often learn to look past the words of a piece of writing and, in so doing, miss what is obvious and quite simple. What follows here are a few general principles to help you in the task of writing papers about the fiction you'll be reading, to alleviate some of your anxiety about the undertaking, and to suggest some ways of approaching the problem of how to write a critical paper about fiction.

The matters discussed in this section are meant to suggest some ways to formulate a critical response and express it in a paper. These are not part of a list or catalog and cannot be set down like a set of commandments or rules, but they do apply to what most students face when the first paper comes due.

And perhaps the thing to be emphasized here is that how much and how well you are able to express yourself about the fiction you are studying depends to a large extent on your own attitude toward the task.

The first thing to remember when you begin to write a paper about fiction is that you must allow for what is direct and *literal* in the words on the page. A work of fiction, in spite of what you may already have internalized about it, is not a code, not something that needs deciphering, particularly, or translation into some other form of expression. One misleading question about fiction, and one of the easiest and, therefore, most often asked questions about it, is "What is the writer *trying* to say?" If the story is any good at all, the writer is in fact *saying* it, whatever it is, and the story itself makes up the terms of that saying. The writer of a good story is almost never trying to be obscure or even difficult; the experience the writer is exploring may be filled with difficulty and ambiguity, but the writer is always striving for *clarity*, trying to be *perfectly* clear.

Therefore, to read a story intelligently, you need bring only your own experience to it and strive to be *open* to what transpires literally on the page. The story will either interest you or it won't. If the story doesn't interest you, the fault may lie with you, in that you are not yet emotionally or intellectually ready for it; it is also possible that the particular story will *never* interest you, and that is one of the reasons why conversations and commentary and friendly arguments about fiction have been going on for as long as fiction has existed. But if the story does *not* interest you, if it does nothing to you, if you feel nothing reading it, I do not recommend that you choose it to write about. When you *do* find a story that interests you—and it is hard to imagine that in an anthology of this variety and size you would not find at least *one* that did so—your first order of business is to read it again. Read it several times, in fact, and you will find with each reading that you notice more about it, that its architecture becomes a bit more readily visible to you, its nature more clear.

But let me go back for a moment.

The difficulty for any new student of fiction is that while you are *reading* stories you are asked to *write* criticism. That is like entering a room full of strangers among whom an animated and widely various conversation has been



going on for centuries and being asked to add something to the conversation. You read a story that you think you might be able to say something about; you even like the story. Yet even though you could sense it breaking down into its component parts as you were reading it and rereading it, when you actually come to thinking about it as a subject for a paper, your mind goes blank. There the story is, like a painting or a piece of sculpture. It is made out of words, but it is just as mute as a statue, just as much a silent, existing, created thing, insisting on its own wholeness, resisting all your efforts to take it apart.

You must understand that this is not an unusual feeling for *any* reader of a truly good story. You are not being confronted with some deficiency in your own ability to *understand* or *get* it; you are simply experiencing the territory, and if you allow yourself a little confusion and uncertainty, you might find that the exploration of the inner workings of the story is fun, that it enhances your enjoyment of it. And though we live in a highly politicized time, we must never lose sight of the fact that one of the most important functions of fictive art is *pleasure*. And so the first rule of thumb for anyone assigned to write a paper about fiction is to *find something that truly does engage you*, something about which you can express yourself in terms other than the artificial, forced, exhausting phrases of false interest—that awful feeling of trying to guess what you believe your professor wants to hear, of trying to say something as if you had the slightest interest in it, when in fact the whole enterprise seems only a little less painful than a dental procedure involving a drill.

Having found a story that does engage you—and by this I mean it has caused some reaction in you, even if that reaction is at first negative—and having read the story again and decided that you will write about it, the next order of business is to locate some aspect of it that especially interests you: its use of language, the presence in it—or lack of presence in it—of one facet or another, the nature of its characters, some element of conflict or treatment of theme, the way any of its internal aspects contrasts or compares to some other story or stories, or how it reflects the values of its time and place or may be applied to the values of our own time and place or even how it may seem *not* to reflect such values, distant or near. You may discover an element of the story that speaks to you on some deeper level about yourself, about something you are afraid of, or ache for, or love. Any element of a story is worth writing about if you have some stake in it, some actual connection to it. And writing about it is how you explore this connection.

It has been said that the best preparation for the reading of any story is to have read all other stories. That is to say that the more you read, the better able you are to respond. But even having read dozens of stories, you may feel at a loss when the time comes to write about one. So let us take the logic a step further and say that the best preparation for writing a piece of criticism is having read all other criticism.

Obviously, you can do no such thing in either case: no one *ever* gets to all there is that is worth reading and remembering. Geoffrey Chaucer was one of the most learned men of his time, and his library contained ninety books. I am a practicing writer of prose fiction, I read both for the love of it and as a profession, and my personal library—a modest one by modern standards—contains more than seventy-five hundred volumes. The remark about prepa-

ration is simply to suggest a truth, though; and writing your paper you will have to address the problem of what we can call “The Customs of Critical Speech.” How do you begin to express yourself in the language of criticism if you have not been reading criticism? If you have had no real taste of how it is done? It is no accident that people who write poetry *read* a great deal of poetry, that people who write fiction read thousands of stories and novels (poets also read novels, of course; and novelists, most of them anyway, also read poetry); but the fact is that one reads a great deal in the form in which one primarily works. That is how we all learn to write; indeed, it is usually the thing that *leads* us to writing. Yet new students of literature are regularly asked to write criticism without having ever really been exposed to any critical writing.

To extend the metaphor of the conversation, then: you have entered this room, people have been discussing a story. The simplest, first strategy, is to familiarize yourself as quickly as possible with the manner and nature of the conversation. You do this by listening in, as it were. By reading some criticism of stories, or of any work of literary art that you already know, have already read. When I teach sophomore literature, before I give any other assignments, I ask my students to do an annotated bibliography about *Hamlet*. They must find ten critical essays about the play, read them, and then summarize them for me, merely to show that they have indeed read the essays. This is less to teach them about *Hamlet* than to expose them to the ways and means of critical speech about that great play and, by extension, about any other work of literature.

What you will find, reading in criticism, is that the work being discussed is rarely considered in its entire form or shape; that the critical writer, in nearly every case, has chosen—or discovered—some vital or crucial but always quite specific aspect of the work and is concentrating on that, tracing its use and the ramifications of its use through the story (or its similarity or difference to some aspect of another story from the same writer, or a contemporary, or even someone far away in time or place). Notice, too, how the critical writer *uses the words of the story itself* to support what he has to say about it. The use of plot summary is always to underscore or illustrate the point, and quotations from the story follow from assertions about it as *demonstrations* of the truth of those assertions.

Too often, student papers about fiction end up merely summarizing the story’s plot and recounting the names of its characters. For teachers of literature, there is nothing so dull as having to read twenty-seven versions of the same plot summary in a single afternoon. And falling into mere plot summary is the most common mistake students make when writing papers, mostly because they do not feel confident talking about the story in any other way, and they have seldom if ever experienced stories being talked about in any other way. (Much of this goes back, no doubt, to the old high school “book report,” in which students are asked to recount book plots more or less as proof that they have done the assigned reading.)

Mere plot summary is likely to be a habit you will have to work to break. And one rather simple way to break it, though at first you may find it difficult to do, is to keep in mind the fact that the audience for your paper about a given story is made up of people who are *familiar* with it.

Here, for instance, is one facet of a story you probably already know; it is a play rather than a work of short fiction, but it will serve to illustrate my point. To audiences in ancient Greece who went to see Sophocles' great *Oedipus Rex*, the story of Oedipus was at least as familiar as the story of Christ is to us (there is a reference to the Oedipus story in Homer, who predates Sophocles by hundreds of years, and the tone of that reference is that it was an *old* story, even then); hence, one of the most interesting elements of that play is the irony in which it is soaked—this mystery story, in which the detective searching for a murderer finds that the murderer is himself, actually contained no mystery at all to the audiences of its time. Instead, there was the excruciating spectacle of Oedipus moving ever closer to the discovery of the truth that everyone in the theater already knew. To write a paper about this, you would use those lines Oedipus speaks that, given the nature of the audience's knowledge, contain the most irony. You might explore how that irony carries the play forward and informs the action; you might show how it extends to other characters in the play and how it shapes the emotions created by the spectacle of the tragedy.

The same approach works when you write criticism about fiction. Your audience is made up of participants in the appreciation of some *part* of a thing with which everyone is acquainted.

So, you choose something *inside* the story, some specific element of its workings that you have noticed, and you present that to your audience, all of whom know the plot of the story, and you move through your discussion of this thing you have noticed, following your assertions about it with proof out of the material of the story, using the words of the story itself to support what you say.

But suppose you cannot find anything in the story that seems worth writing about? Suppose that, even having found a story with which you feel a connection, you are still unable to settle on some specific element of it? On page 27 you'll find a list of general questions including a wide range of approaches for exploring the details of any good story. You need only look over the list and then turn to your story and think through some of these questions in relation to the story. If that fails to spark something, try looking at what some of the contemporary writers in this book have had to say about stories by other writers, living and dead. You might even find one that you wish to add to, or take issue with. But as you read, see how often these contemporary writers *use the words of the stories themselves* to make their observations about those stories. Pay close attention to the ways in which they move from assertion to quotations, from the exploration of something *about* the story to the use of details *from* the story to support their claims.

To write a paper about a work of fiction is simply to take part in a civilized and polite conversation about it with others who have read the same story, to say something meaningful about a matter of importance to you. If the story has moved you in some way, then you will be saying something meaningful as it applies to your own life, your own experience, your own interests. And in the act of expressing this, of working through the story, you become a sharper reader, you develop a more sophisticated sense of language as it is used by artists, and you become less likely to be fooled by empty rhetoric and cant, by the flood of falsity and hype all around you, by the ways in which

society names you and places you and makes assumptions about you and tries to control you—for whatever purpose, even if only to sell you something you don't need. By reading good short fiction, and thinking critically about it, you not only gain the deeper pleasures there are in the contemplation of this superior art form but become more free. No less than that.

Finally, remember that fiction is about *experience*, that its truths are not necessarily—they are not even very often—merely philosophical truths, but contain the truths of *felt life*; that good stories break down the barriers between peoples and times and cultures; that fiction speaks to us across boundaries as distant as the centuries and as unbridgeable as death itself. The editors of this anthology hope you will find something that engages you, something about which you can speak passionately, in terms of the pleasure that reading good stories provides. As fiction writers—as practicing short-story writers—we take issue with the idea that the study of literature is a science; literature is far too disruptive and unruly and filled with human contradiction to be any such thing, and writers have never been in the business of engineering better human beings. Thus we encourage you to think about the stories in this book as works of art that relate to life most consistently as an *enhancement* of being—and perhaps only a momentary one at that—and that they resemble more closely all the other good stories that you may happen to be reading, or have read, than they resemble the life we actually lead, even though, in that momentary shapeliness that always obtains when a story is told, they somehow make us feel life more vividly. We hope you will make *connections*, not theories or ideology. We hope you will consider the poetry you read and hear in these prose pieces as elements of the lovely songs that exist in them, concentrating on the art of the expression rather than what you may have already been taught to search out in terms of social constructs or political “stances.”

Politics is politics, and everything else is everything else.

The study of fiction is mostly the study of everything else, and politics is no more nor less important to storytelling than botany or history or psychology or religion. Most good writers are steeped in all of these things and more, without being in thrall to any of them. And by the phrase *everything else*, we mean what it is like to be alive on the planet earth at widely various points in the human journey. What it feels like being new, being crowded or alone, being in love or out of it, worrying, trying, failing; succeeding, growing old, or wishing one were older; missing lost friends, lost loved ones, or being reunited with them; fearing for one's children; living with regret, with the hope of revenge, or with an obsession; being weak or timid or confused, or consumed with fury; hating something or dreading it; wanting something and not being able to have it; grieving or gathering strength; bearing the remorseless facts of existence with some kind of dignity and with some kind of grace; facing damnation or achieving redemption. Absurdity, foolishness. Folly and heroism. What it means to be alive, engaged in the struggle to be decent, and prosperous, too. In other words, the nature of the human family in all its complexity, its age-old refusal to conform to any reductive idea about itself.

## General Questions

*The following questions are designed to guide your approaches to your reading and to preparing papers or notes for classroom discussion. It is by no means necessary to prepare systematic answers for all or any of the stories. Obviously not all questions need to be answered in relation to any particular story.*

### EXPOSITION AND SETTING

1. How and when has the author introduced the main characters?
2. How much background information or history has the author provided for the main characters? At what point in the story, and by what means, is this background information brought in? What makes such backgrounding necessary or (in cases in which it is scanty or lacking altogether) unnecessary? Are the characters made quickly comprehensible by representing them as familiar types?
3. To what extent is a prevailing and preexisting conflict used as a jumping-off place for the present action of the story? How has the author made us aware of this situation or conflict?
4. What is there of special interest or significance in the setting of the story? By what means are we informed about the details of the setting? At what point in the story? How is its relation to the significance of the action expressed?
5. Is the setting vividly represented or merely implied by the way in which events unfold? Has the author assumed that readers would be familiar with the significant qualities to be found in this setting?
6. How is the setting exploited to enhance or control the mood of the story? How does it help to bring out the feelings or emotions experienced by the characters?
7. In stories told in the first person, do we learn essential things about the narrator by the feelings or attention the narrator devotes to the setting?
8. Could the action take place meaningfully in another setting? That is—has the setting been chosen arbitrarily, for its own sake, or because it has an integral connection with the action?

### PLOT

1. Do the meaning and emotional impact of this story heavily depend on the working out of the plot? Or is the plot—if it is noticeable at all—subordinate to the other elements?
2. To what extent does the action of the plot arise from the kinds of characters depicted in the story and their relation to each other?
3. Are there any major breaks or omissions in the chain of events or episodes of the plot? Is the outcome of the plot consistent with the actions that initiated it? If there is a surprise ending, does it emerge from some unforeseen but plausible change in direction of the plot line?
4. How is the plot related to the chronology of the story? That is, have some decisive actions, necessary to the plot, taken place before the narration begins? Is the narration halted with an implication that some event still to come will round out the plot?

5. Test the plot for meaning and credibility by imagining alternative events which, at any point, might have made for a different outcome.
6. What motivations in the characters are necessary to move the plot along?

#### CHARACTER AND CONFLICT

1. Who is the central character, or who are the central characters? What means has the author used to demonstrate their qualities? To what extent are the characters defined by contrast with minor characters?
2. Do we understand the characters as types or as individuals? By their actions? Their speech? Their thoughts? (It may be useful for you to pick a single instance of action, speech, or thought and ask in what ways it represents the character to whom it is attributed.)
3. Which characters are active and which passive within the pattern of the story?
4. Does the story show growth or change of character? How much of the story's meaning depends on such growth or change?
5. How much of the conflict in the story arises from an opposition between the central character and his or her environment?
6. Is the conflict inherent in the personality of the characters assembled by the author, or in the backgrounds they represent?
7. How has the author worked to involve the reader's sympathies for certain characters, and how does this contribute to the reader's assessment of the issues of the conflict?
8. How much are the characters (or their representation) conditioned by their time and place?

#### POINT OF VIEW AND PERSON OF NARRATION

1. Has the author confined the narration to a single point of view? Taking into account the nature of the material in the story, what apparent advantages lie in telling it from the point of view actually chosen?
2. What potentially interesting aspects of the subject matter have been subordinated or omitted by the choice of point of view?
3. In first-person narration, to what extent does the author appear to have identified himself with the narrator? What has the author gained by keeping a distinction between himself and the personality of the narrator?
4. What would be gained or lost by changing the narration from first to third person, or vice versa?
5. How is the point of view complemented by the style and diction? How do self-imposed limits of diction reinforce the emotional impact of a story or focus its meaning?
6. Is an illusion of reality enhanced by choice of point of view? A sense of immediacy?

#### THEME

1. Does the story make a general statement about life or experience? Can this be stated in the form of a maxim? Does the so-called maxim really provide a complete statement of the story?

2. Is the thematic statement accomplished chiefly by the outcome of the action? What qualifications and shadings are given to it by the characters' awareness of what has happened to them?
3. What values and ideas are reflected in the conflict from which the thematic statement comes?
4. Is the theme a traditional one? Has the story given a new twist to traditional wisdom? Where else—in literature, history, or religion—have you encountered a similar theme? Can you recall a poem or another story that makes a comparable thematic statement?

#### DESCRIPTION, REPRESENTATION, AND SYMBOL

1. Pick out some examples of language used by the author to stimulate and control the reader's visualization of the scene. Consider not only individual words and phrases but the accumulations and combinations of nouns, verbs, and their modifiers in paragraph structures.
2. How have the details chosen by the author given the essential appearance of characters or scene? Is the story fully presented to your senses? Comment on the adequacy of the description.
3. Has the author relied on your familiarity with certain scenes, characters, and situations to fill in what has been omitted from the actual text of the story?
4. How has the objectively rendered action of the story helped you to understand the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of the characters? Can you fill in the thought processes of those characters whose thoughts are not described?
5. What objects, acts, or situations have a symbolic meaning? Are the characters aware of these symbolic meanings? Has the author used symbols as a means of communicating to the reader some meanings not implicit in the action and not understood by any character in the story?

#### MODE (AS IT APPLIES)

1. What devices or instances has the author relied on to heighten the comic (or pathetic, tragic, satiric, elegiac) effect of the story?
2. What exaggerations or distortions of reality have been used to shape the material of the story to a particular purpose? Could the same material serve another purpose? (For example, in the case of comedy, could the material have been treated in a way that would produce a tragic effect?)
3. To what extent has the author manipulated the tone of the story to give a special flavor to the material?
4. With what views of life does this story fit best?
5. What satiric or ironic elements can you distinguish in the story? Do these dominate the whole story? Are they consistent with the overall quality of the story, or do they provide tension, variety, and suspense as you wait to learn what the author is really driving at?
6. Does the story appeal chiefly to a romantic or realistic sensibility? Does it tend to stir up pity, contempt, amusement, awe, dismay, admiration, or a desire that life should be different?

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