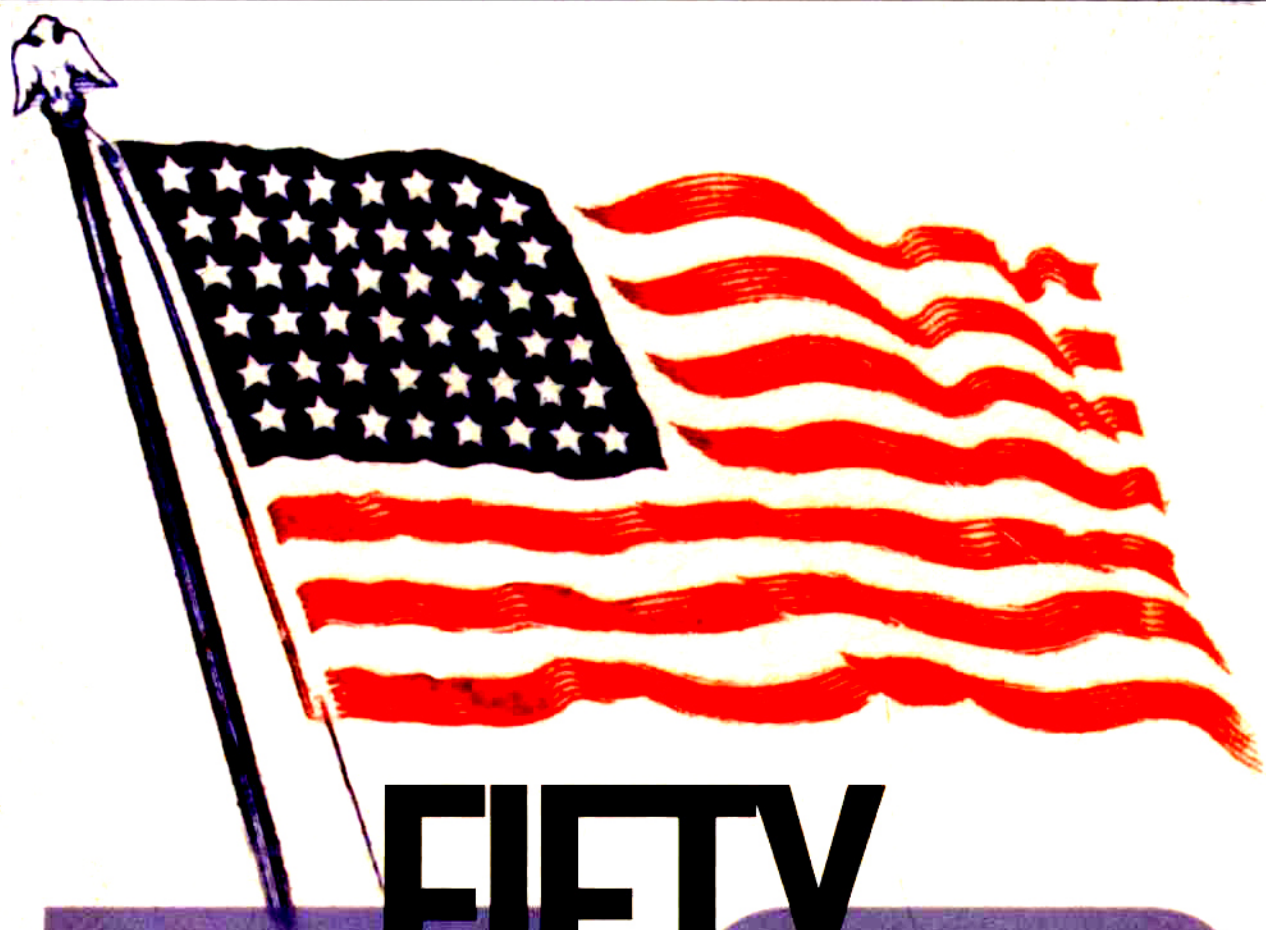


B A N T A M C L A S S I C



FIFTY GREAT AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

Edited and with an Introduction by Milton Crane

50 GREAT AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

*Edited and with an Introduction by
Milton Crane*

Professor of English Literature
The George Washington University



B A N T A M C L A S S I C

FOR TOM AND PETER



50 GREAT AMERICAN SHORT STORIES
A Bantam Book

PUBLISHING HISTORY

Bantam Classic mass market edition published March 1965

Bantam Literature edition / April 1972

Bantam Classic reissue / June 2008

Sources and permissions are located on pages 645–647 and constitute an extension of the copyright page.

Published by Bantam Dell
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York, New York

All rights reserved
Copyright © 1965 by Bantam Books
Cover art copyright © Danilo Ascione/Shutterstock
Cover design by Elizabeth Shapiro

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 65-13863

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Bantam Books and the rooster colophon are registered trademarks of Random House, Inc.

ISBN 978-0-553-27294-9

Printed in the United States of America
Published simultaneously in Canada

www.bantamdell.com

OPM 55 54 53 52 51 50 49 48 47 46

INTRODUCTION

IT HAS frequently been observed that the modern short story is to a striking degree an American creation. Certainly the first important writers in this newest (and also, quite conceivably, oldest) form of fiction were Americans, and the critic who first endeavored to formulate a poetics of the short story, and who gained a worldwide reputation for his own stories, was the American Edgar Allan Poe.

More significant, however, than our desire to plant the American flag on the North Pole of the short story is the fact that American achievements in the short story have commanded international respect and admiration for a century and a half, or as long as the genre may be said to have existed in its modern form. It is not easy to obtain general agreement on the antiquity of the short story, or even on its precise definition. These two problems obviously are linked. If we were to adopt, for example, an abbreviation of Abel Chevalley's definition of the novel (cited by E. M. Forster in his perennially fresh and lively *Aspects of the Novel*): "a fiction in prose of a certain extent (*une fiction en prose d'une certaine étendue*)," then we might be permitted to claim as a short story that most powerful and memorable of all short narratives, the story of King David, Bath-sheba, and the prophet Nathan (II Samuel 11–12). The same is true of the celebrated Milesian tale that has come down to us as "The Widow of Ephesus." But, on the other hand, there are critics who

maintain vigorously that these two stories are tales, however excellent, and not short stories in the modern sense. This term they reserve for short fiction dealing principally with the evocation of mood and the revelation of character, as practiced by Chekhov, Joyce, and their followers. By this standard, the tale, as written by Kipling, Guy de Maupassant, or W. Somerset Maugham, is a special literary genre, which employs basically primitive narrative techniques to achieve limited aesthetic effects.

It is not the business of this book to try to render or apply a definitive judgment in this continuing controversy. The short story seems to me to be sufficiently flexible and eclectic to accommodate both Kipling's tales and Chekhov's vignettes—and, for that matter, Virginia Woolf's impressionistic sketches and Sylvia Townsend Warner's fables. A form that includes "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "A Municipal Report," "Mme. Tellier's Establishment," "Mario and the Magician," and "The Golden Honeymoon" can hardly be accused of being narrowly restrictive or exclusive. One is tempted to conclude that only so liberal a definition of the short story as that which M. Chevalley proposed for the novel can encompass such bewildering varieties of literary experience.

The present collection attempts to give the reader a comprehensive and representative view of the ways in which Americans have written short stories from the days of Washington Irving to the present. Since 1800 the form has been used by novelists, poets, humorists, satirists, social critics, and reporters. All are represented here. Such familiar stories as Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Bret Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," and Stephen Vincent Benét's "By the Waters of Babylon," have been included, because each seemed uniquely representative of a major

aspect of its author's talent. On the other hand, I have chosen certain stories that have rarely, if ever, been reprinted since they were first published. Among them are Edith Wharon's "The Dilettante," Finley Peter Dunne's "Mr. Dooley on the Popularity of Firemen," Charles M. Flandrau's "A Dead Issue" (an extraordinary portrait of a world-famous philosopher as a young man), and James Reid Parker's "The Archimandrite's Niece," for which that great editor the late Harold Ross had a very special regard.

Like every collection of modern short stories, this book is in part a reflection of the changing character of American magazines, which once provided a rich market for the writer of short stories. Today, the number of magazines that publish serious short stories is sadly diminished. Partly for this reason, *The New Yorker's* domination of the field is now virtually uncontested, and its influence has become unimaginably wide. *The New Yorker* has been so frequently and so excessively criticized in recent years for allegedly imposing stereotypes on the work of gifted young writers that we must in fairness ask: How much poorer would the American short story be today without *The New Yorker*, which for more than a generation has set our standards?

The fifty stories that compose this book mirror the development of American literature, from the gradual discovery of the American mind and nation to the new awareness of an identifiably American imagination. And it is altogether fitting that the short story, with its instantaneous snapshots of life arrested and captured, should have emerged as the characteristic and outstandingly successful form in which this imagination has found expression.

MILTON CRANE

The George Washington University
Washington, D. C.

CONTENTS

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GERMAN STUDENT

Washington Irving 1

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN Nathaniel Hawthorne 8

MS. FOUND IN A BOTTLE Edgar Allan Poe 24

THE FIDDLER Herman Melville 37

WHAT WAS IT? Fitz-James O'Brien 45

LUCK Mark Twain 61

THE OUTCASTS OF POKER FLAT Francis Bret Harte 66

THE DAMNED THING Ambrose Bierce 80

THE TWO FACES Henry James 91

A NEW ENGLAND NUN Mary E. Wilkins Freeman 108

THE COURTING OF SISTER WISBY Sarah Orne Jewitt . . . 123

THE DILETTANTE Edith Wharton 142

MASTERS OF ARTS O. Henry 154

EFFIE WHITTLESY George Ade 171

MR. DOOLEY ON THE POPULARITY OF FIREMEN

Finley Peter Dunne 179

THE BRIDE COMES TO YELLOW SKY Stephen Crane . . . 182

A DEAD ISSUE	Charles M. Flandrau	196
THE LOST PHOEBE	Theodore Dreiser	223
FATHER IS FIRM WITH HIS AILMENTS	Clarence Day . . .	243
DEATH IN THE WOODS	Sherwood Anderson	249
TO BUILD A FIRE	Jack London	264
THE USE OF FORCE	William Carlos Williams.	284
OLD FOLKS' CHRISTMAS	Ring W. Lardner	289
SILENT SNOW, SECRET SNOW	Conrad Aiken	301
BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON	Stephen Vincent Benét . .	323
SOLDIERS OF THE REPUBLIC	Dorothy Parker	339
MR. PREBLE GETS RID OF HIS WIFE	James Thurber	344
CLUNEY MC FARRAR'S HARDTACK	John McNulty.	349
THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT	Robert M. Coates	354
THE OLD PEOPLE	William Faulkner	365
GRAPES FOR MONSIEUR CAPE	Ludwig Bemelmans	387
A MAN OF THE WORLD	Ernest Hemingway.	400
THE HOUR OF LETDOWN	E. B. White	405
THE RESTING PLACE	Oliver La Farge	411
THE TOUCH OF NUTMEG MAKES IT	John Collier.	426
THE HARNESS	John Steinbeck	437
FRIEND OF THE FAMILY	Kay Boyle	453

THE RUMOR	Erskine Caldwell	464
THERE WAS A YOUNG LADY OF PERTH		
William Saroyan		472
THE DOWNFALL OF FASCISM IN BLACK		
ANKLE COUNTY	Joseph Mitchell.	483
THE FRENCH SCARECROW	William Maxwell.	494
THE BLUE-WINGED TEAL	Wallace Stegner.	511
THE ARCHIMANDRITE'S NIECE	James Reid Parker.	532
A MOTHER'S TALE	James Agee.	540
THE NATIONAL PASTIME	John Cheever.	565
THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER DRESSES		
Irwin Shaw.		583
THE DEATH OF SHORTY	Richard P. Bissell	590
GRANDMA AND THE HINDU MONK		
Seymour Freedgood.		596
MADAME ZILENSKY AND THE KING OF FINLAND		
Carson McCullers		621
THE LUCID EYE IN SILVER TOWN	John Updike.	632
Copyright Notices and Acknowledgments		645
Selected Bibliography		648

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GERMAN STUDENT

BY WASHINGTON IRVING

ON A stormy night, in the tempestuous times of the French Revolution, a young German was returning to his lodgings, at a late hour, across the old part of Paris. The lightning gleamed, and the loud claps of thunder rattled through the lofty narrow streets—but I should first tell you something about this young German.

Gottfried Wolfgang was a young man of good family. He had studied for some time at Göttingen, but being of a visionary and enthusiastic character, he had wandered into those wild and speculative doctrines which have so often bewildered German students. His secluded life, his intense application, and the singular nature of his studies, had an effect on both mind and body. His health was impaired; his imagination diseased. He had been indulging in fanciful speculations on spiritual essences, until, like Swedenborg, he had an ideal world of his own around him. He took up a notion, I do not know from what cause, that there was an evil influence hanging over him; an evil genius or spirit seeking to ensnare him and ensure his perdition. Such an idea working on his melancholy temperament produced the most gloomy effects. He became haggard and desponding. His friends discovered the mental malady preying upon him, and determined that the best cure was a change of

scene; he was sent, therefore, to finish his studies amidst the splendors and gayeties of Paris.

Wolfgang arrived at Paris at the breaking out of the revolution. The popular delirium at first caught his enthusiastic mind, and he was captivated by the political and philosophical theories of the day: but the scenes of blood which followed shocked his sensitive nature, disgusted him with society and the world, and made him more than ever a recluse. He shut himself up in a solitary apartment in the *Pays Latin*, the quarter of students. There, in a gloomy street not far from the monastic walls of the Sorbonne, he pursued his favorite speculations. Sometimes he spent hours together in the great libraries of Paris, those catacombs of departed authors, rummaging among their hoards of dusty and obsolete works in quest of food for his unhealthy appetite. He was, in a manner, a literary ghoul, feeding in the charnel-house of decayed literature.

Wolfgang, though solitary and recluse, was of an ardent temperament, but for a time it operated merely upon his imagination. He was too shy and ignorant of the world to make any advances to the fair, but he was a passionate admirer of female beauty, and in his lonely chamber would often lose himself in reveries on forms and faces which he had seen, and his fancy would deck out images of loveliness far surpassing the reality.

While his mind was in this excited and sublimated state a dream produced an extraordinary effect upon him. It was of a female face of transcendent beauty. So strong was the impression made, that he dreamt of it again and again. It haunted his thoughts by day, his slumbers by night; in fine he became passionately enamoured of this shadow of a dream. This lasted so long that it became one of those fixed ideas which haunt the minds of melancholy men, and are at times mistaken for madness.

Such was Gottfried Wolfgang, and such his situation at the time I mentioned. He was returning home late one stormy night, through some of the old and gloomy streets of the *Marais*, the ancient part of Paris. The loud claps of thunder rattled among the high houses of the narrow streets. He came to the Place de Grève, the square, where public executions are performed. The lightning quivered about the pinnacles of the ancient Hôtel de Ville, and shed flickering gleams over the open space in front. As Wolfgang was crossing the square, he shrank back with horror at finding himself close by the guillotine. It was the height of the reign of terror, when this dreadful instrument of death stood ever ready, and its scaffold was continually running with the blood of the virtuous and the brave. It had that very day been actively employed in the work of carnage, and there it stood in grim array, amidst a silent and sleeping city, waiting for fresh victims.

Wolfgang's heart sickened within him, and he was turning shuddering from the horrible engine, when he beheld a shadowy form, cowering as it were at the foot of the steps which led up to the scaffold. A succession of vivid flashes of lightning revealed it more distinctly. It was a female figure, dressed in black. She was seated on one of the lower steps of the scaffold, leaning forward, her face hid in her lap; and her long dishevelled tresses hanging to the ground, streaming with the rain which fell in torrents. Wolfgang paused. There was something awful in this solitary monument of woe. The female had the appearance of being above the common order. He knew the times to be full of vicissitude, and that many a fair head, which had once been pillowed on down, now wandered houseless. Perhaps this was some poor mourner whom the dreadful axe had rendered desolate, and who sat here heart-broken on the strand of existence, from which all that was dear to her had been launched into eternity.

He approached, and addressed her in the accents of

sympathy. She raised her head and gazed wildly at him. What was his astonishment at beholding, by the bright glare of the lightning, the very face which had haunted him in his dreams. It was pale and disconsolate, but ravishingly beautiful.

Trembling with violent and conflicting emotions, Wolfgang again accosted her. He spoke something of her being exposed at such an hour of the night, and to the fury of such a storm, and offered to conduct her to her friends. She pointed to the guillotine with a gesture of dreadful signification.

"I have no friend on earth!" said she.

"But you have a home," said Wolfgang.

"Yes—in the grave!"

The heart of the student melted at the words.

"If a stranger dare make an offer," said he, "without danger of being misunderstood, I would offer my humble dwelling as a shelter; myself as a devoted friend. I am friendless myself in Paris, and a stranger in the land; but if my life could be of service, it is at your disposal, and should be sacrificed before harm or indignity should come to you."

There was an honest earnestness in the young man's manner that had its effect. His foreign accent, too, was in his favor; it showed him not to be a hackneyed inhabitant of Paris. Indeed, there is an eloquence in true enthusiasm that is not to be doubted. The homeless stranger confided herself implicitly to the protection of the student.

He supported her faltering steps across the Pont Neuf, and by the place where the statue of Henry the Fourth had been overthrown by the populace. The storm had abated, and the thunder rumbled at a distance. All Paris was quiet; that great volcano of human passion slumbered for a while, to gather fresh strength for the next day's eruption. The student conducted his charge through the ancient streets of the

Pays Latin, and by the dusky walls of the Sorbonne, to the great dingy hotel which he inhabited. The old portress who admitted them stared with surprise at the unusual sight of the melancholy Wolfgang, with a female companion.

On entering his apartment, the student, for the first time, blushed at the scantiness and indifference of his dwelling. He had but one chamber—an old-fashioned saloon—heavily carved, and fantastically furnished with the remains of former magnificence, for it was one of those hotels in the quarter of the Luxembourg palace, which had once belonged to nobility. It was lumbered with books and papers, and all the usual apparatus of a student, and his bed stood in a recess at one end.

When lights were brought, and Wolfgang had a better opportunity of contemplating the stranger, he was more than ever intoxicated by her beauty. Her face was pale, but of a dazzling fairness, set off by a profusion of raven hair that hung clustering about it. Her eyes were large and brilliant, with a singular expression approaching almost to wildness. As far as her black dress permitted her shape to be seen, it was of perfect symmetry. Her whole appearance was highly striking, though she was dressed in the simplest style. The only thing approaching to an ornament which she wore, was a broad black band round her neck, clasped by diamonds.

The perplexity now commenced with the student how to dispose of the helpless being thus thrown upon his protection. He thought of abandoning his chamber to her, and seeking shelter for himself elsewhere. Still he was so fascinated by her charms, there seemed to be such a spell upon his thoughts and senses, that he could not tear himself from her presence. Her manner, too, was singular and unaccountable. She spoke no more of the guillotine. Her grief had abated. The attentions of the student had first won her

confidence. and then, apparently, her heart. She was evidently an enthusiast like himself, and enthusiasts soon understand each other.

In the infatuation of the moment, Wolfgang avowed his passion for her. He told her the story of his mysterious dream, and how she had possessed his heart before he had even seen her. She was strangely affected by his recital, and acknowledged to have felt an impulse towards him equally unaccountable. It was the time for wild theory and wild actions. Old prejudices and superstitions were done away; everything was under the sway of the "Goddess of Reason." Among other rubbish of the old times, the forms and ceremonies of marriage began to be considered superfluous bonds for honorable minds. Social compacts were the vogue. Wolfgang was too much of a theorist not to be tainted by the liberal doctrines of the day.

"Why should we separate?" said he: "our hearts are united; in the eye of reason and honor we are as one. What need is there of sordid forms to bind high souls together?"

The stranger listened with emotion: she had evidently received illumination at the same school.

"You have no home nor family," continued he; "let me be everything to you, or rather let us be everything to one another. If form is necessary, form shall be observed—there is my hand. I pledge myself to you forever."

"Forever?" said the stranger, solemnly.

"Forever!" repeated Wolfgang.

The stranger clasped the hand extended to her: "Then I am yours," murmured she, and sank upon his bosom.

The next morning the student left his bride sleeping, and sallied forth at an early hour to seek more spacious apartments suitable to the change in his situation. When he returned, he found the stranger lying with her head hanging over the bed, and one arm thrown over it. He spoke to her,

but received no reply. He advanced to awaken her from her uneasy posture. On taking her hand, it was cold—there was no pulsation—her face was pallid and ghastly. In a word, she was a corpse.

Horried and frantic, he alarmed the house. A scene of confusion ensued. The police was summoned. As the officer of police entered the room, he started back on beholding the corpse.

“Great heaven!” cried he, “how did this woman come here?”

“Do you know anything about her?” said Wolfgang eagerly.

“Do I?” exclaimed the officer: “she was guillotined yesterday.”

He stepped forward; undid the black collar round the neck of the corpse, and the head rolled on the floor!

The student burst into a frenzy. “The fiend! the fiend has gained possession of me!” shrieked he; “I am lost forever.”

They tried to soothe him, but in vain. He was possessed with the frightful belief that an evil spirit had reanimated the dead body to ensnare him. He went distracted, and died in a mad-house.

Here the old gentleman with the haunted head finished his narrative.

“And is this really a fact?” said the inquisitive gentleman.

“A fact not to be doubted,” replied the other. “I had it from the best authority. The student told it me himself. I saw him in a mad-house in Paris.”

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

YOUNG GOODMAN Brown came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

“Dearest heart,” whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, “prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she’s afeard of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year.”

“My love and my Faith,” replied young Goodman Brown, “of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done ’twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?”

“Then God bless you!” said Faith, with the pink ribbons; “and may you find all well when you come back.”

“Amen!” cried Goodman Brown. “Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee.”