

THE
COLUMBIA COMPANION
TO THE
TWENTIETH-CENTURY
AMERICAN SHORT STORY

Blanche H. Gelfant, Editor

Lawrence Graver, Assistant Editor



columbia university press
new york

Columbia University Press

Publishers Since 1893

New York Chichester, West Sussex

Copyright © 2000 Columbia University Press

All rights reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Columbia companion to the twentieth-century American short story / Blanche H.

Gelfant, editor.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-231-11098-7 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Short stories, American—Dictionaries. 2. American fiction—20th century—Dictionaries. 3. Short stories, American—Bio-bibliography—Dictionaries. 4. American fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography—Dictionaries. 5. Authors, American—20th century—Biography—Dictionaries. I. Title: Columbia companion to the 20th century American short story. II. Gelfant, Blanche H., 1922--

PS374.S5 C57 2001

831'.010905—dc21 00-031610

Casebound editions of Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

Designed by Chang Jae Lee

Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Introduction

i

PART I. *Thematic Essays*

The American Short Story Cycle

9

The American Short Story, 1807–1900

15

The African American Short Story

25

The Asian American Short Story

34

The Chicano-Latino Short Story

42

The Ecological Short Story

50

Lesbian and Gay Short Stories

56

The Native American Short Story

64

Non-English American Short Stories

72

The American Working-Class Short Story

81

American Short Stories of the Holocaust

94

PART II. *Individual Writers
and Their Work*

Alice Adams (1926–1999)
105

Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941)
109

James Baldwin (1924–1987)
114

John Barth (1930–)
117

Donald Barthelme (1931–1989)
121

Rick Bass (1959–)
127

Richard Bausch (1945–)
130

Charles Baxter (1947–)
135

Ann Beattie (1947–)
138

Saul Bellow (1915–)
144

Gina Berriault (1926–)
149

Doris Betts (1932–)
152

Paul Bowles (1910–1999)
154

Kay Boyle (1902–1992)
158

Ray Bradbury (1920–)
162

Kate Braverman (1950–)
166

Larry Brown (1951–)
172

Erskine Caldwell (1903–1987)
175

Hortense Calisher (1911–)
180

Truman Capote (1924–1984)
184

Raymond Carver (1938–1988)
188

Willa Cather (1873–1947)
193

John Cheever (1912–1982)
199

Sandra Cisneros (1954–)
205

Walter Van Tilburg Clark (1909–1971)
209

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1930–)
211

Robert Coover (1932–)
215

Lydia Davis (1947–)
219

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1953–)
223

Andre Dubus (1936–1999)
226

Deborah Eisenberg (1946–)
234

Stanley Elkin (1930–1995)
239

George P. Elliott (1918–1980)
242

John Fante (1909–1983)
245

James T. Farrell (1904–1979)
248

William Faulkner (1897–1962)
251

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)
258

Richard Ford (1944–)
264

Mary Gaitskill (1954–)
268

William H. Gass (1924–)
272

Ellen Gilchrist (1935–)
276

Herbert Gold (1924–)
282

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)
286

Amy Hempel (1951–)
293

Mary Hood (1946–)
297

Langston Hughes (1902–1967)
300

Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960)
305

Shirley Jackson (1916–1965)
310

Jamaica Kincaid (1949–)
314

Ring Lardner (1885–1933)
319

David Leavitt (1961–)
325

Ursula K. Le Guin (1929–)
329

Meridel Le Sueur (1900–1996)
333

Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1944–)
337

Jack London (1876–1916)
341

David Wong Louie (1954–)
345

Norman Mailer (1923–)
349

Bernard Malamud (1914–1986)
353

Bobbie Anne Mason (1940–)
358

Mary McCarthy (1912-1989)
361

Elizabeth McCracken (1966-)
366

Carson McCullers (1917-1967)
369

Thomas McGuane (1939-)
373

James Alan McPherson (1943-)
377

Nicholasa Mohr (1938-)
380

Lorrie Moore (1957-)
384

Toshio Mori (1910-1980)
390

Bharati Mukherjee (1940-)
394

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977)
399

Joyce Carol Oates (1938-)
403

Tim O'Brien (1946-)
409

Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964)
413

John O'Hara (1905-1970)
420

Tillie Olsen (1913?-)
423

Simon Ortiz (1941-)
430

Cynthia Ozick (1928-)
433

Grace Paley (1922-)
439

Américo Paredes (1915-1999)
444

Dorothy Parker (1893-1967)
447

Jayne Anne Phillips (1952-)
452

Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980)
456

William Sydney Porter (O. Henry)
(1862-1910)
462

Annie Proulx (1935-)
468

Thomas Pynchon (1937-)
476

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (1896-1953)
480

Alberto Alvaro Ríos (1952-)
483

Philip Roth (1933-)
487

Damon Runyon (1880-1946)
490

J. D. Salinger (1919-)
494

Bienvenido N. Santos (1911-1996)
501

William Saroyan (1908-1981)
504

Delmore Schwartz (1913-1966)
508

Leslie Marmon Silko (1948-)
512

Jean Stafford (1915-1979)
515

Wallace Stegner (1909-1993)
519

John Steinbeck (1902-1968)
523

Elizabeth Tallent (1954-)
526

Peter Taylor (1917-1994)
530

James Thurber (1894-1961)
536

John Updike (1932-)
540

Helena María Viramontes (1954-)
547

Anna Lee Walters (1946-)
549

Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989)
554

Sylvia A. Watanabe (1953-)
556

Eudora Welty (1909-)
560

Edith Wharton (1862-1937)
569

Joy Williams (1944-)
573

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)
579

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)
582

Tobias Wolff (1945-)
586

Richard Wright (1908-1960)
591

Hisaye Yamamoto (1921-)
596

Anzia Yezierska (1881-1970)
600

Index
605

CONTRIBUTORS

Kerry Ahearn
Oregon State University

Dale M. Bauer
University of Kentucky

Jonathan Baumbach
Brooklyn College

Robert Bell
Williams College

Lauren Berlant
University of Chicago

Erik Bledsoe
University of Tennessee

Kasia Boddy
University College, London

Jane Bradley
University of Toledo

Leonor Briscoe
Burke, Virginia

Suzanne Hunter Brown
Dartmouth College

Emily Budick
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

John Burt
Brandeis University

Robert Caserio
Temple University

Maria Elena Cepeda
University of Michigan

Nancy Cook
University of Rhode Island

Robert Corber
Trinity College

John Crawford
University of New Mexico

Elizabeth Cummins
University of Missouri

Morris Dickstein
City University of New York

Arthur Edelstein
Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study

Stephen E. Fix
Williams College

Edward Foster
Stevens Institute of Technology

Robert Fox
Columbus, Ohio

Rhonda Frederick
Boston College

Andrew Furman
Florida Atlantic University

Fred Gardaphe
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Blanche H. Gelfant
Hanover, New Hampshire

Melody Graulich
Utah State University

Lawrence Graver
Williams College

Joan Wylie Hall
University of Mississippi

James Hannah
Texas A&M University

Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper
Decatur, Georgia

Tobey Herzog
Wabash College

Eric Heyne
University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Allen Hibbard
Middle Tennessee State University

Molly Hite
Cornell University

Greg Johnson
Kennesaw State University

Carla Kaplan
University of Southern California

Alice Kessler-Harris
Columbia University

Michelle Latiolais
University of California, Irvine

Luis Leal
University of California, Santa Barbara

Shirley Geok-lin Lim
University of California, Santa Barbara

Amy Ling
University of Wisconsin

Glen Love
University of Oregon

Wendy Martin
Claremont Graduate University

Peter Mascuch
University of New Hampshire

Charlotte S. McClure
Atlanta, Georgia

Lee Mitchell
Princeton University

David Mogen
Colorado State University

John Murphy
Brigham Young University

James Nagel
University of Georgia

Jay Parini
Middlebury College

Richard Pearce
Wheaton College

Sanford Pinsker
Franklin and Marshall University

Donald Pizer
Tulane University

Horace Porter
University of Iowa

Ruth Prigozy
Hofstra University

Janet R. Raiffa
New York, New York

Josna Rege
Dartmouth College

Russell Reising
University of Toledo

Gary Richards
University of New Orleans

Julie Rivkin
Connecticut College

Deborah Rosenfelt
University of Maryland

James Ruppert
University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Roshni Rustomji-Kerns
Stanford University

Elaine Safer
University of Delaware

Ramon Saldivar
Stanford University

Geoffrey Sanborn
Williams College

Gary Scharnhorst
University of New Mexico

John Seelye
University of Florida

Sofia Shafquat
Encinitas, California

Mark Shechner
State University of New York at Buffalo

Karen Shepard
Williams College

Ben Siegel
California State Polytechnic University

David L. Smith
Williams College

Larry Smith
Firelands College of Bowling Green State
University

Werner Sollors
Harvard University

[xiv] CONTRIBUTORS

Silvia Spitta
Dartmouth College

Phillip Stambovsky
New Haven, Connecticut

David Stouck
Simon Fraser University

Rodger L. Tarr
Illinois State University

James Warren
Columbia University Press

Dennis Washburn
Dartmouth College

Barry Weller
University of Utah

Max Westbrook
University of Texas, Austin

Kenny Williams
Duke University

Mary Ann Wilson
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Norma C. Wilson
University of South Dakota

Mary Ann Wimsatt
University of South Carolina

Dede Yow
Kennesaw State University

Zhou Xiaojing
State University of New York at Buffalo

THE
COLUMBIA COMPANION
TO THE
TWENTIETH-CENTURY
AMERICAN SHORT STORY

INTRODUCTION

*A story can . . . open us up,
by cut or caress, to a new truth.*

—Andre Dubus—

Designated a *companion* to the twentieth-century American short story, this collection of essays is both an accessory to the stories and writers it presents and a guide. As accessory or aide, it accompanies the stories, providing information about their writers' lives and literary achievements. As a guide, it points out literary paths taken by American writers whose works are admired throughout the world. By necessity, it has left many roads untraveled. Readers may wish that the *Columbia Companion* could have pursued these paths, some of them paved recently by best-selling young storytellers such as Nathan Englander and Melissa Bank, whose work appeared after this book went to press, as did the prize-winning stories of Barbara Mujica and Judy Doenges. Their absence and that of certain older, established writers argues for a sequel to *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story*, a project perhaps for the twenty-first century.

Each of the essays is self-contained and can be read singly or in any sequence. However, if read chronologically, according to the writers' dates, the collected essays trace a history of the short story's development from the beginning of the century to the present, from Jack London and O. Henry to Andre Dubus, Joy Williams, Tobias Wolff, Deborah Eisenberg, David Leavitt, Lydia Davis, Nicholasa Mohr, Américo Paredes, and a dazzling diversity of others. Two sets of essays suggest this diversity: thematic essays that

group together stories sharing a particular motif, cultural identity, or literary practice; and biographical essays, the body of the book, that focus on individual writers and their work. Writers mentioned in the thematic essays—Langston Hughes, Bernard Malamud, or Sandra Cisneros, for instance—may reappear in a biographical essay. Thus they are both contextualized and particularized, placed within a literary group and presented as unique artists.

All of the essays are designed to inform—to tell of a treasury of stories that evoke the multifariousness of American life by their variety and, by their brevity, suggest the fragmentation of the modern experiences they mirror. Offering practical criticism rather than theory, the *Columbia Companion* suggests ways of reading for understanding and pleasure. Thus it bypasses the vexed questions argued by short story theorists, the most argued of which is the most fundamental—that of definition. What, in essence, is the short story as a literary genre? What element distinguishes it from other narrative forms? Is it brevity (an arguable relative term), or any of the particular features favored by particular theorists, notably, unity of impression (posited by Edgar Allan Poe and now disputed); closure (absent in open-ended stories); dramatic conflict (missing in plotless stories); metaphysical substructures (underlying apparently realistic stories); or a “lonely voice” (heard by the Irish writer Frank O’Connor)? Is it appropriate, aesthetically and politically valid, to designate stories as American? What makes a story American? A sense of place, evoked by the writer’s national origin or the story’s

physical setting or locale; a sense of history, conveyed by a story’s social themes or by a language and style traceable, through their colloquial intonations, to the oral traditions of American tall tales (and of storytelling generally)? Or is a story American because it dramatizes some aspect of a hypostasized American character?

American, short, story—these designating terms have become increasingly contentious, debated as literary and political issues. But central as terminological questions may be to critical theory, they are for the most part peripheral to the *Columbia Companion*’s essays, which assume that the texts they discuss are short stories, commonly regarded as such and quickly distinguished from anecdotes, sketches, fables, myths, parables, or any other short prose narrative. Readers at all levels of sophistication readily recognize a story and respond to it accordingly, though the genre is unnervingly fickle in its form. For American stories (like those of all lands) are realistic, romantic, modernistic, minimalistic, fantastical, mundane, parodic, gothic, comic, tragic, satirical, grotesque. They have a plasticity and thematic span that make reading them a wondrous surprise. By focusing on the act of reading, the *Columbia Companion* hopes to evoke expectations of the unexpected, of surprises that may be mixed with pleasure, poignancy, and the enrichment or loss that comes with wisdom.

For some readers, the essays will be introductory, a handbook that, like a good companion, guides them to a protean literary genre possessed with the power to enlarge their social and aesthetic vision. For literary critics (as opposed to general

readers), the collection is a reference to consult, one that can remind them of stories they may have forgotten and acquaint them with new and boldly harrowing tales of contemporary life. The modernity of these tales—their mixed modes and sadly savvy sense of alienation—filiates from great twentieth-century storytellers to whom many American writers declare themselves indebted. Among the European masters frequently cited are Chekhov and Joyce; among South Americans, the exponent of magical realism, García Márquez. At the same time, modern writers acknowledge the influence of nineteenth-century storytellers who brought to American fiction the landscape and language of a new nation that was discovering, in Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James, its own ghosts, and in Mark Twain and Bret Harte, its own humor and colloquialisms. These and other writers—Irving, Crane, Chesnutt, Freeman, Jewett—are discussed in an introductory essay that gives a synoptic account of nineteenth-century American stories.

The essays that follow this account show how stories can be mixed and matched, commonly by class (working-class stories), gender (gay and lesbian stories), and ethnicity (African American, Asian American, Native American, Latino/a stories). Four essays suggest other ways of categorizing stories. Two deal with dire motifs: “The Ecological Short Story” with an imperiled environment, and “American Short Stories of the Holocaust” with the traumatizing memories of characters living in America. A third essay discusses short story sequences, collections of linked stories that can be read independently and as part of a continuous

narrative, such famous works as *Winesburg, Ohio*, *In Our Time*, and, in recent times, John Updike’s *Olinger Stories* and Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*. Last, a resourceful essay describes a wide range of stories critics consider American though they are written in languages other than English. Ways of grouping stories are indeed illimitable, as anthologists of short stories have discovered. Their collections display the virtuosity of story writers who can dramatize what seems the same human relationship or the same locale in strikingly different ways.

These differences emerge in the essays on individual writers, which by their number (a hundred and thirteen) turn the *Columbia Companion* into an elaborate do-it-yourself kit packed with literary material that can be ingeniously combined. A reader interested in regionalism, a subject critics are now rethinking, will find, for instance, a variety of writers focused on the American West, among them such well-known figures as Willa Cather, John Steinbeck, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Thomas McGuane, and Wallace Stegner. The South has long been renowned for its storytellers, a large and multifarious group of writers who have influenced each other and the world’s vision of the South as a place distinctive in its history, manners, and speech, and yet undeniably American in ways that sometimes seem ineffable. Like many of the writers in this volume, certain southern storytellers are famous throughout the world for novels—notably, of course, William Faulkner. The world-famous southern playwright Tennessee Williams has also written remarkable short stories, which an essay brings to the reader’s attention.

Other essays throughout the book alert readers to themes being explored by contemporary women writers, such as the relationship between a mother and daughter, which in Lorrie Moore's stories is fixed by prescribed roles that neither character can escape.

Like the thematically determined essays, each of the hundred and more essays on individual story writers is distinctive, shaped in form and content by the critic who wrote it. However, all contain a brief biographical sketch, an overview of the writer's career and major motifs, an analysis of some representative stories, and a selected bibliography. Essay writers followed the general guidelines they were given in their own ways, some telling more, others less, about a writer's life. Each determined which stories and how many to choose for an exemplary reading. All present their material in clear, accessible language, though their voices vary. I am gratefully aware that the contributors have made this collection possible. They were generous with their time and literary insights, gracious in their response to editorial suggestions. As critics, writers, and professors, they were busy and committed, and yet they would willingly revamp a completed essay to include a writer's newly published, and often most acclaimed, book of stories. Their advice helped shape the *Columbia Companion* as they suggested story writers who should be noted and recommended colleagues who could, and did, write essays that enhance the collection. Unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, two contributors found they could not complete the essays they had been promising, and so the book lacks entries for Alice Walker, Toni Cade

Bambara, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. I regret these omissions (as well as others) caused by the wayward circumstances that will beset any project.

As the *Columbia Companion's* literary editor, I have been a kind of accessory after the fact, someone who helped bring to realization a project conceived by the executive editor for reference books of Columbia University Press, James Warren. In an unexpected telephone call, he asked me to serve as literary editor of the *Columbia Companion*, and so began a long and close relationship based on a shared desire to do well by the book. I am grateful to James Warren for all kinds of support along the way, and particularly for heeding my plea for help after I had been working long and relentlessly as sole editor. No one could have given help more graciously than Lawrence Graver, who agreed to edit a number of essays and did so with a good cheer that I found wonderfully infectious. He and I worked together on several pieces, and perhaps compulsively, I added my editorial two cents to comments he made on the essays he reviewed. Professor Graver also contributed splendid critiques of Raymond Carver, Stanley Elkin, and John Updike.

In the early stages of planning, as I was reading hundreds and hundreds of short stories—a happy windfall of this project—I had help in assembling the table of contents from friends and colleagues. One of the most steadfast of friends, the young writer Michael Lowenthal, sent long lists of authors to consider, starring those he thought must be in the volume (as they are) and suggesting topics for the introductory thematic essays. Two contributors, Werner Sollors and Amy Ling,

were helpful consultants early on; they also sent lists of writers and recommended critics whom I might contact. Unhappily, Professor Ling did not live to see this publication or to receive her readers' thanks for the critiques of Asian American literature that are her scholarly legacy.

I will not attempt to name the contributors who became e-mail pals over the past years. Their airborne friendship was an unexpected reward of editing, a task I had long bypassed in favor of teaching and writing. Over the years, I found myself writing about various American storytellers whose work enthralled and sometimes dismayed me (all of them are in this volume), and my impulse to tell of stories I love is still strong. It is a common impulse, expressed in an often-heard imperative: "You must read this story." Perhaps sharing a story means sharing a newly perceived truth, as the writer Andre Dubus observed. A "story can . . . open us up, by cut or caress, to a new truth," Dubus wrote in an essay on Hemingway's famous story "In Our Time" (*Meditations*). The caress of a story, I believe, is experienced as aesthetic pleasure, the sheer delight evoked in a reader by an indelible work of art. A lifelong appreciation of the story's art as well as of its truths has guided me as literary editor of *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story*, a book indebted to many peo-

ple and dedicated to many—teachers, students, literary critics, theorists, and the reader at large, who, like me, like most of us, loves a good story.

Blanche H. Gelfant

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Walter. *The Short Story in English*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Dubus, Andre. "A Hemingway Story." *Meditations From a Moveable Chair*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.
- Litz, A. Walton, ed. *Major American Short Stories*. Third edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Lohafer, Susan, and Jo Ellyn Clarey, eds. *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1989.
- Magill, Frank N., ed. *Critical Survey of Short Fiction*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Salem Press, 1981.
- May, Charles E., ed. *Short Story Theories*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976.
- O'Connor, Frank. *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*. Cleveland: World Publishing, 1963.
- Peden, William. *The American Short Story: Front Line in the National Defense of Literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964.
- Williford, Lex, and Michael Martoni, eds. *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

PART I

Thematic Essays

THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY CYCLE

The short story cycle is one of the most important forms of fiction in twentieth-century American literature. Although it has gone largely unrecognized as a genre distinct from the more highly organized "novel" and from the loose "collection" of stories, it has played an important role in literary history. A form centuries older than the novel, collections of unrelated narratives reach back to antiquity, to the Greek "cyclic" poets whose verse supplemented Homer's epics of the Trojan war, and to such landmark literary achievements as *The Odyssey*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Many of the significant medieval plays were produced in dramatic "cycles," each work serving as an independent entity while at the same time gaining in significance from the matrix of relationships with the dramas on either side of it. With the historical development of the concept of "fiction" and the ensuing establishment of periodical literature, the tradition of short stories produced in collections of linked episodes ultimately evolved. The convention of the form was that each element be sufficiently complete for independent publication and yet serve as part of a volume unified by a continuing setting, or ongoing characters, or developing themes, or coalescent patterns of imagery. In English literature, James Joyce's *Dubliners* has served as an archetype of the genre, a role fulfilled in the United States by Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*.

In American literature, the genre emerged in the early nineteenth century in the form of related sketches and tales, beginning with Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* in 1820, unified by setting and regional character types. Nathaniel Hawthorne gave the form greater sophistication in his "Legends of the Province House," published as part of *Twice-Told Tales* (1851), as did Herman Melville in the *Piazza Tales* (1856). As brief fiction evolved into the more realistic "story" after the Civil War, the genre became increasingly popular, finding expression by writers of both genders and a broad spectrum of ethnic groups. Harriet Beecher Stowe dealt with "Downeast" characters and speech in *Sam Lawson's Oldtown Fireside Stories* (1871), and George Washington Cable depicted the South in *Old Creole Days* (1879), as did Kate Chopin in *Bayou Folk* (1894). Hamlin Garland dealt with economic and social injustice in the upper Midwest in his *Main Travelled Roads* (1891), one of the landmarks of American naturalism, and Margaret Deland explored themes of small town life in Pennsylvania in *Old Chester Tales* (1898). By the turn of the century, nearly a hundred volumes of interrelated short stories had been published in America, and the form was yet to find its most significant expression.

The short story cycle in twentieth-century American literature is decidedly a multiethnic tradition, perhaps because the brief narrative has its origins in the oral tradition and descends through cultures in every part of the world, uniting them in a legacy of universal storytelling. The evolution of the form would naturally take place with the telling of tales related to those told before, perhaps by other speak-

ers. The formal "novel," as an extended narrative with a dominant protagonist and a central plot that extends from beginning to end, is not as universal an expression as is a series of stories linked to each other with continuing elements, whether ongoing characters, places, or situations. As the tradition evolved, often the stories would be told by a community of tellers weaving a pattern of related episodes involving a group of actors, each a brief tale having its own resolution. Scores of volumes of narrative cycles appeared in each decade of the new century, some of them containing individual stories that are among the best ever published in English, among them William Faulkner's "The Bear," which appeared as part of *Go Down, Moses*.

In the early decades of the century, for example, Susie King Taylor's *Reminiscences of My Life: A Black Woman's Civil War Memories* (1902) contributed an African American perspective on the most momentous event of the previous century. In *Friendship Village* (1908), Zona Gale perpetuated the emphasis on regional depictions, using her native Wisconsin. Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), assembled from stories she had begun publishing in the 1890s, was the first important Asian American work of fiction. In a series of episodes linked by continuing characters and themes, and set in either San Francisco or Seattle, she was able to explore the complex psychology of cultural dualism and the process of social assimilation for Chinese immigrants. Zitkala-Sa served something of the same function in her *American Indian Stories* (1921), writing out of her Lakota background.

From this period, however, it is Sher-

wood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that attracted sustained attention and recognition. This volume of twenty-five stories, all set in a mythical midwestern town, further developed the traditional theme of the "village virus," depicting submerged lives, sexual frustration, and thwarted hopes and aspirations. Unified by a continuing narrative voice, by the setting, and by coalescent motifs, these stories also feature a dominant central character, George Willard, whose quest for self-realization and maturity creates a primary line of development for the volume, a strategy used successfully in such volumes as Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1937), and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Hemingway used not only the continuing character of Nick Adams, who progresses from adolescence to adulthood in the course of thirty-two narrative units, but also the unifying motif of the desire for "peace in our time" in a world of violence, war, cruelty, and disillusionment. Steinbeck used a similar technique to trace the development of a young boy, Jody, growing up on a ranch in California and learning about the realities of life and death. Faulkner's volume is unified by family relationships, the central characters all being descendants of Carothers McCaslin. As the title would indicate, a continuing theme is the fate of African American characters in the period after the Civil War. In "The Bear," a young white boy, Ike McCaslin, grows to moral maturity under the guidance of an older man of color, and, in the end, Ike relinquishes an inheritance of wealth built in an era of slavery, severing his ties to a legacy of cruelty and injustice.

In the period between the two wars, the short story cycle gained increased visibility and stature. John Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) is a key book, portraying the plight of families living in a mythical valley in California while developing the naturalistic themes that would inform his greatest work, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck used a similar organizational strategy for his stories about an Italian neighborhood in Monterey in *Tortilla Flat* (1935). This period produced many important volumes of interrelated stories, among them Mourning Dove's *Coyote Stories* (1933), Caroline Gordon's *Aleck Maury*, *Sportsman* (1934), Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935), and Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), illustrating the cross-cultural appeal of the genre. Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), unified by themes of white oppression of black families, and William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* (1938), held together by a continuing protagonist, Bayard Sartoris, were indicative of the range of the genre.

The next two decades brought the further enrichment of the tradition in the appearance of such volumes as Erskine Caldwell's *Georgia Boy* (1943), Edmund Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County* (1959), and, most notably, Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1947), a brilliant series of stories set around Morgana, Mississippi, in the period from 1900 to roughly 1940. As the title would suggest, all of the stories in some way relate to the themes of longing and searching in W. B. Yeats's celebrated poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus." Peter Taylor's *The Widows of Thornton* (1954) featured eight stories and one play dealing with family relations in

a small southern town. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), Paula Marshall presented a sequence of remarkable stories set in Brooklyn about an immigrant family from Barbados.

In *Going to Meet the Man* (1965), James Baldwin presented eight stories featuring progressively older black men in the midst of dramatic social transitions. Writing in a more metafictional mode, John Barth offered fourteen stories about the process of composition in *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), a widely celebrated book most often regarded as a "novel," is, in fact, five long narratives based on Chinese mythology. That year, in *Speedboat*, Renata Adler told several stories about a journalist in New York, a book that, rather ironically, won the Ernest Hemingway Award for the best first "novel" of the year. Russell Banks's *Trailerpark* (1981) was tightly unified in that it presented thirteen stories about people living in mobile homes in New Hampshire, many of whom interact in the course of this book.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the short story cycle has become an even more prominent genre, with much of the very best fiction produced in America, written from a variety of ethnic perspectives, appearing in that form. The number of minority writers choosing to write story cycles rather than novels might suggest that such authors live in an environment in which the tradition of the "story," with its long history deriving from the oral tradition, is a more familiar and natural expressive form than the "novel," decidedly a written medium of European origin. In a contemporary world charac-

terized by progressive fragmentation and alienation, an episodic mode better reflects the psychic nature of modern life than would the extended flow of experience represented in long fiction. It would seem also that the changing nature of the literary market, with publishing houses eager for blockbuster novels, makes it easier for writers to establish themselves by writing stories for magazines and assembling them later to form cycles. Whatever the reason, the cycle has become increasingly vibrant in recent years as a fiction mode for writers of all ethnic traditions.

For example, Gloria Naylor won the American Book Award for *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), a volume of seven stories set in an African American community. Louise Erdrich, writing from a Native American perspective, won the National Book Award in 1984 for *Love Medicine*. The *New York Times* called it one of the eleven best books of the year and, within a remarkably short period, it was in print in ten languages. This series of fourteen stories told the complex multigenerational story of three families living in what remains of their traditional culture while trying to find their place in white society. Sandra Cisneros used the form for her portrayal of Latino society in Chicago in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), which won the Before Columbus American Book Award for 1985. In a series of forty-four compressed vignettes, Cisneros sketched the life of Esperanza Cordero, a young Mexican American girl whose family has recently moved into a disappointing new house in a rough neighborhood. Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985) is a classic cy-

cle comprising eight stories, all previously published in *The New Yorker*, recording a young girl's painful but exciting development from age ten to seventeen, tracing her fight for independence from her mother and her quest to find a place in the world for herself, which prompts her to leave home forever.

In *Seventeen Syllables* (1985), Hisaye Yamamoto used the form to tell stories about Japanese American experience, particularly that in the internment camps during World War II. Louise Erdrich again used the genre in *The Beet Queen* (1986), forging an overarching narrative out of independent stories about a Native American family. In *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986), Denise Chavez linked together seven stories of Chicano life centered on the maturation of a young woman, Rocio. Perhaps the most celebrated story cycle in the last decade is Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), a best-seller in hardcover and paperback that was quickly made into a major motion picture. In a highly structured group of sixteen stories, divided precisely into four groups of four, with alternating sets of tales told by mothers and daughters, Tan traces the immigration of four Chinese women into the United States and their attempt to inspire their daughters to sustain an interest in their native culture.

But it is not only minority writers who have found the cycle format an appropriate medium. John Updike, for example, has published several volumes of interrelated stories, beginning with *Olinger Stories* (1964), works that trace the development of a local country boy. *Too Far to Go: The Maple Stories* (1979) records the

marriage, separation, and divorce of a suburban couple. The three volumes of stories about Henry Bech, *Bech: A Book* (1970), *Bech Is Back* (1982), and *Bech at Bay: A Quasi Novel* (1998), focus on conflicts in the life of a cosmopolitan urban writer. Harriet Doerr's *Stones for Ibarra* (1984) is a stunning portrayal of life in a Mexican village as seen from the perspective of an American couple that has come to manage a silver mine. Told with sympathy and yet ironic humor, these stories constitute an ongoing narrative while at the same time resolving a central conflict in each episode. One of the finest books in recent decades, Susan Minot's *Monkeys* (1986) is a remarkable collection of nine minimalist stories depicting salient episodes in the lives of the Vincent family, particularly that of young Sophie. The cultural conflict in this volume is not interracial but that of social class: "Mum" derives from an inner-city Irish Catholic family, while "Dad" is from an established Yankee tradition with long ties to Harvard.

Tim O'Brien used the tradition of the story cycle for *The Things They Carried* (1990), a searing portrayal of the moral and psychological burdens carried by young men in the military during the Vietnam War. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) is a series of fifteen stories by Julia Alvarez about the life of a family from the Dominican Republic just before and after their immigration to the United States. Of particular emphasis are the theme of cultural duality and the process of social assimilation. Whitney Otto used the form for more "homely" matters in *How to Make an American Quilt* (1991), a

series of seven stories about the members of a California quilting circle. Robert Olen Butler's *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992) to some extent balances O'Brien's portrait of Americans in Southeast Asia by depicting the lives of Vietnamese in America after the conclusion of the war.

There are scores of other examples of the genre in modern American literature, but even these few examples demonstrate how important the short story cycle has become in contemporary fiction. It is a convention that needs to be recognized and understood not simply as ancillary to the more significant "novel" but as integral to literary history, with an ancient origin and a set of narrative and structural principles quite distinct from other fictional modes. That for the last century many of the most important works of this kind were written by authors from differing ethnic backgrounds suggests that despite its ancient history, the story sequence offers not only a rich literary legacy but also a vital technique for the exploration and depiction of the complex interactions of gender, ethnicity, and individual identity. It is an important genre, and it deserves to be defined and studied in terms of its vital and continuing contribution to twentieth-century American fiction.

James Nagel

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1991.
- Butler, Robert Olen. *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*. New York: Henry Holt, 1992.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- Crane, Stephen. *Whilomville Stories*. New York: Harper, 1900.
- Dunbar-Nelson, Alice. *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899.
- Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984.
- Garland, Hamlin. *Main-Travelled Roads*. Boston: Arena, 1891.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *In Our Time*. New York: Scribners, 1925.
- Ingram, Forrest L. *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. *Modern American Short Story Sequences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *Annie John*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985.
- Mann, Susan Garland. *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1989.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Pastures of Heaven*. New York: Viking, 1932.

THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY,

1807–1900

It is customary to suggest that the short story in America has its start in certain tales by Washington Irving, most famously "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," published in *The Sketch Book* in 1820, stories with plots borrowed from German folktales but that became so thoroughly Americanized as to be thought of as native to our soil. However, a much earlier Irving story, "The Little Man in Black," has had an enduring influence. Included among the *Salmagundi* sketches in 1807, it established the "Mysterious Stranger" convention often associated with Mark Twain (because of the title of his never completed novel), a convention that continues to appear in the modern period, as Robert Penn Warren attests in an essay on his own "Blackberry Winter."

Even the stories of the man awakened to post-Revolutionary War America and the Yankee schoolteacher driven from a sleepy Hudson Valley town retain the essential frame of the "mysterious stranger" convention—which is that of the advent of an unknown and often unwelcome person who threatens the peace of a closed community. Exploiting the tension produced by the opposition of a minority to the wishes of the majority (early detected by de Tocqueville), the convention was particularly relevant to the United States during the rise of the short story, which occurred as that country made its slow and at times painful transition from fed-

eralism to Jeffersonian republicanism to Jacksonian democracy.

"Rip Van Winkle" was a parable apt in other ways to the United States in the 1820s, whose citizens at once took advantage of improvements in technology and yet expressed a deep uneasiness over the swiftness of the changes that inventions effected. Indeed, the short story itself, along with the steam-propelled riverboat and cotton gin (both of the last associated with the epochal year 1807, as were Irving's *Salmagundi* stories), was an American invention. The story's brevity was suited to a reader perpetually short of time, who desired the speed of communications and production that characterized the inventions of Fulton and Whitney.

Washington Irving, at least in his short fiction, was no friend to technological innovation. His sketches of life in the England of the 1820s seldom reflect the labor unrest of the day; instead, they create an antiquarian utopia into which the authorial persona, Geoffrey Crayon, retreats, finding a kind of sanctuary of Merry Olde England in the home of the eccentric master of Bracebridge Hall, modeled on Sir Walter Scott's *Abbotsford*. Nor were Irving's two chief heirs of the short story genre, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, particularly friendly to the age of improvements heralded by President John Quincy Adams and celebrated by the chief orator of the day, Daniel Webster. Though an active Democratic Party worker, Hawthorne at the start of his career avoided the present for the past, and sought to establish himself as a writer of what we now call gothic fiction. In imitation of European writers, he availed himself of the past as a zone sufficiently

unfamiliar as to permit a certain license with the observable facts of life—identified by him with the notion of "romance."

Hawthorne is supposed to have rifled the chronicles of the American colonial archives in quest of these materials, but by the early 1830s, when his stories first appeared, a number of writers had already established that period as a rich field for romantic fiction. Nonetheless, in the short story, Hawthorne's genius was unrivaled, and like Irving he wrote fables, such as "The Minister's Black Veil," "Young Goodman Brown," and "The Ambitious Guest," which through their popularity became virtual folktales. Also like Irving, he repeatedly returned to the theme of social alienation, which, in a Puritan setting—as in "The Gentle Boy"—took on the hard edge of persecution.

In contrast to Hawthorne, Poe did not evoke a historical setting for his stories, but despite his southern heritage, which was associated with the ongoing dispute over slavery, escaped the present controversy by inventing his own midregions of the imagination. His was a vaguely located but undoubtedly European scene, explicitly so in "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Cask of Amontillado," undeniably so in "The Fall of the House of Usher." Both writers were exotic in their geographies, but Hawthorne is commonly not thought of as such, perhaps because of his insistence on the historical validity of his often overwrought colonial scene. Certainly his insistence on deriving a moral lesson from his parables separates him in all respects from Poe, who is the most amoral of nineteenth-century writers, not only in America but in Europe as well, before the advent of the 1890s.

Of the two, it was Poe who continued to command a popular (as opposed to schoolroom) audience well into the twentieth century, this despite the attempts of his contemporaries to discount his work because of his personal life, the alcoholism and perhaps even opium addiction that resulted in his inability to hold the editorial positions that sustained him and his strange family, and that led to his early death. Hawthorne's personal and domestic life, by contrast, were solidly middle-class (following a youthful reclusive period associated with his literary apprenticeship), but his short fiction, being so morally constricted as to amount to virtual allegories, had greater difficulty in making the transition to the modern period. It is *The Scarlet Letter*, originally conceived as a short story, by which he is best known.

By 1853, Poe was dead and Hawthorne had turned from the short story set in the distant past to the novel with a modern setting, providing an opening that Herman Melville filled with a sudden explosion of talent. Famous today for his novelistic masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*, which failed to find a popular audience in his lifetime, Melville in the early 1850s reacted to that failure by seeking a wider readership and increased income. This effort first resulted in the misbegotten romance, *Pierre*, but then, unpredictably for an author who seemed perpetually to let his fictions run away with him, in a series of short stories that demonstrated an instant mastery of the highly compressed and stringent form. The first published was perhaps the greatest, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," yet another exercise in the mysterious stranger genre that tran-

scended the convention, so far ahead of the author's own times that it disappeared for a century, until it was resurrected late in the Melville revival. A contemporary witness has testified that in the Greenwich Village of the 1940s and 1950s, everyone had read and was talking about Melville's "Bartleby," shadows of which may be detected in the fiction of Saul Bellow from that time.

Of equal power was Melville's longer and less concentrated tale, "Benito Cereno," which also had to wait a century for recognition, a story that challenged both Hawthorne and Poe at their own gothic game and created a parable strongly anchored in the antislavery debate of the 1850s. So relevant did that story remain for people aroused by the civil rights struggle a century later that Robert Lowell dramatized it as part of his sequence *Old Glory*. "Bartleby," which appeals to modern writers because of its surreal qualities, also calls to mind the Transcendental revolt against materialism. Irving's pseudo folk-fables set in the Hudson Valley also reflected political concerns of his own day, "Sleepy Hollow," especially, with its Yankee-Yorker conflict.

Irving's influence was everywhere in the 1850s, from Melville's powerful parables to the dreamy romanticism of the sketches in Donald G. Mitchell's ("Ik. Marvell") *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850), a favorite book of the young Emily Dickinson, to the pleasant purlieu of George W. Curtis's *New York in Prue and I* (1856). This last was a collection of connected sketches that notably featured a lassitudinous, even diaphanous young clerk who is advertised as Bartleby's friend, a connection that shows the great distance be-

tween the imaginations of these two contemporaries, Melville a contributor to, and Curtis a founding editor of, *Putnam's Magazine*, the most influential and well-paying periodical of its day.

From its inception, the American short story was connected to the rise of periodical literature in the United States, starting with the coterie journal *Salmagundi* and then expanding with much wider-circulating magazines, from *Harper's* to *Godey's* to *Graham's*, and including dozens of short-lived publications, many of which lasted a year or so before disappearing into debt. Poe, associated with both *Graham's* and the *Southern Literary Messenger*, spent his last years attempting to launch a magazine of his own, which undoubtedly would have suffered the fate of so many of his heroes (and himself)—a premature demise.

An alternative venue for the short story was the gift book, an annual collection of poetry and prose dressed out with engravings produced in time for the Christmas market in which a number of tales by Hawthorne and Poe first appeared. Unlike the magazines, the gift book was destined as a permanent fixture in the parlor, being relatively expensive and bound in gilt-embossed cloth or leather. Magazines were considered as ephemeral as the soft-paper wrappers in which they first appeared, although large numbers of the most popular survive in bound sets, confirming the hesitancy of Americans to dispose of something once they have bought it.

Short stories in periodicals in America seem to have been primarily written for readers on the run, so to speak, contrasting with the three-decker novels then in vogue, most of which were imported from

Great Britain, where the short story did not flourish until much later in the century, and then as an art form rather than as an item intended for popular consumption. In America, the production of short fiction from the 1830s on was vast, resulting in a kind of literary iceberg, the tip of which is represented by the work of Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville, while the bulk has remained below the surface. Even Longfellow early on tried his hand at short fiction, before settling for what proved to be for him the more profitable trade of poetry. Still, it was Longfellow's narrative poems that were the most successful, and *Evangeline* was derived from an anecdote first suggested to Hawthorne as the basis of a short story. The young Walt Whitman also ground out short fiction for the magazines, but he too opted for the long, if non-narrative, poem.

By the 1860s, a newer generation of writers began to appear, most of whose work is little known today. Edward Everett Hale, for example, wrote a considerable number of stories, but he is remembered solely for "The Man Without a Country," a patriotic tale inspired by the Civil War. It would be the local-color writers identified with the post-Civil War period who were to dominate the genre. Harriet Beecher Stowe, associated with the great novel in protest of slavery that brought her sudden fame in 1852, had begun her literary career ten years earlier with a collection of short pieces entitled *The Mayflower; or, Sketches of Scenes and Characters Among the Descendants of the Pilgrims* (1843). In *Sam Lawson's Oldtown Fireside Stories* (1872), Stowe produced a volume of New England tales that in terms of priority, if not actual influence, laid

the foundation for much fiction about her native region that appeared subsequently.

Perhaps the most imitated short-story writer of the post-Civil War generation was Bret Harte, a New Yorker who followed the Gold Rush belatedly to California, where he became an editor and a positive influence on the emerging career of Mark Twain. Harte's tales with a Western setting, first collected in *The Luck of the Roaring Camp* (1870), would resonate down through the last third of the century and remain popular until his death. His mixture of rustic dialect, humorous situations, and sentimental conclusions managed to convince readers that such places as Angel's Camp actually existed, though they were for the most part an imaginative compound distilled from Dickens.

Harte too was indebted to Irving, his "Spanish" stories having been inspired by the older writer's tales of "Dutch" coloration, while his "The Right Eye of the Commander" resonates with Irving's conventions, including the mysterious stranger device. It is, however, Harte's sentimental stories of the Gold Rush frontier, like "The Luck of the Roaring Camp," in which the presence of the infant reformed a mining town, that made Harte famous. These stories are distinguished also by the original creation of an enduring American mythic type, the noble gambler, though the famous John Oakhurst, who figures memorably in Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," has in his personal sacrifice all the markings of Dickens's Sidney Carton.

If Harte was an innovator in the local-color convention, it must be allowed that

his California (like Irving's Hudson Valley, Hawthorne's colonial Massachusetts, and Poe's mid-region of weird) was largely a territory of the postromantic imagination, a geographic anachronism validated by the grotesque stories of Ambrose Bierce. An Ohio-born journalist and Civil War veteran who migrated to California, Bierce inherited Poe's dark mantle, writing sardonic ghost tales with western settings and, most famously, surreal stories inspired by his wartime experience, such as "An Occurrence at Owl-Creek Bridge," notable for a trick ending that still brings readers up with a literal snap. Like Harte a voluminous but uneven writer, Bierce is best represented by his collection *Stories of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891).

Both Bierce and Harte were only superficially realistic in their fiction, while the regionalists associated with New England were most in tune with the emerging tradition of the 1870s and '80s. Realism as an ideology was chiefly associated in American literature with William Dean Howells and Mark Twain, neither of whom excelled in the art of the short story. George Washington Cable was famous in his day for his Creole tales, which drew upon the New Orleans backdrop and rendered skillfully the Cajun dialect, but for most American readers, his setting, like Harte's, was exotic.

Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkens Freeman made regionalism a serious dimension of literary realism, their stories of New England accurately and at times painfully rendering the minutiae of a region in decline. Jewett's "A White Heron," collected in a volume of stories of that title in 1886, is a masterpiece of the genre, a powerful fable playing off the