

# STORY TO ANTI-STORY

**ROHRBERGER**



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❁ ❁ ❁ *Story to Anti-Story*

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## \*\*\* PREFACE

The seventy stories collected in this volume have been chosen to represent the genre from its beginnings in the early nineteenth century to the present day. It is, of course, difficult to locate origins, and one must admit that in all likelihood short fiction has been around from the time people sat around fires to tell stories and certainly from the time people began to write them down. But short prose fiction of the kind first presented in the beginning of the last century by writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nikolai Gogol exhibits common characteristics that came to define a genre whose birth was announced later in the century by the American critic and writer Brander Matthews. *Story to Anti-Story* is an attempt to represent in an anthology the origins and development of the short story as it has moved through three distinct phases. But, though the developmental phases are distinct, basic genre characteristics remain the same, and one can see from the earliest examples of the form the directions which it was to take.

The introductory material in *Story to Anti-Story* provides a rationale for the text's organization and the selection of authors represented in it. Because the text is based on the idea that genre characteristics can be recognized, the opening pages of the introductory material present to students the important ideas first articulated by Matthews and by Edgar Allan Poe, two of the earliest theoreticians of the genre. This section culminates in a definition that, though necessarily loose,



## PREFACE

is workable, both in the way it points out genre characteristics and in the way it provides a standard for aesthetic judgment. The second part of the introductory material discusses the three developmental phases in the history of the short story: the first (or *early*) phase, as represented by Hawthorne, Poe, and Gogol and their followers; the second (or *modern*), as represented by Chekhov, Mansfield, Joyce, and Anderson and their followers; and the third (or *contemporary*), as represented by Kafka, Borges, and Nabokov and their followers. These developmental (or modal) phases provide the headings under which the stories have been grouped, and suggest those writers who, by dint of their importance to the genre's development, are represented by multiple stories. The third part of the introductory material discusses the process of interpretation and analysis, while presenting to the students those necessary terms whose understanding contributes to an adequate and satisfying communication between author and reader and between student and instructor.

A brief headnote introduces each author with a biographical statement and a comment on his or her place in the development of the genre, pointing out, when appropriate, an author's significant contribution to the form. Headnotes also include a comment about the story or stories to follow; such comments suggest directions or provide insights that students may find helpful in initial readings. Study questions and comments follow each story; these are designed to elicit responses from students regarding key problems in the stories and to provide reinforcement for the critical vocabulary. With the questions based on a Socratic model, the order in which these questions are taken up becomes important.

The text includes seventy stories by fifty-five authors. More than half are American, a fact that seems to support the contention of many scholars that the short story is a peculiarly American form, its brevity particularly suited to the American character. Still, the representation of European and South American authors is substantial, providing variation and fresh perspective; multiple selections by writers from other continents provide an opening on to the international character of the short story as genre. In the selections, I have not attempted to impose any kind of artificial quota system. Fortunately, the form itself and the authors who use it provide sufficient scope so that sexes, races, classes, and ethnic groups are given fair representation. In addition, you will find well-known stories by well-known authors, lesser-known stories by well-known authors, well-known stories by lesser-known authors, and lesser-known stories by lesser-known authors. Included also are examples of such sub-genres as the science fiction story and the detective story.

As a textbook, *Story to Anti-Story* should be of use to instructors and students who desire both a historical perspective showing the development and continuity of the form as well as an analytical approach. But the usefulness of a text is finally determined by the excellence and variety of the stories themselves and by the uses students and instructors can make of them with or without the guidance provided by format and apparatus. The selection of stories provided here can be arranged along a graduated scale from the simple to the complex, can be grouped according to various thematic divisions, and can be approached according to the various devices of fiction. The index of authors and the glossary,

cross-referenced to the text, should help instructors and students make arrangements other than the one provided by the format of the text. Moreover, there are sufficient selections within each of the three major groupings to permit concentrated reading in one or another of these groups while seeing each one in light of what has come before or what will follow. In addition, the abundance of study questions can be used to provide writing topics as well as departure points for classroom discussion. In short, my aim has been to make the text as useful as possible, while providing depth, breadth, and a rationale both for selection and arrangement.

I need to mention one other point: Here you will find print not too small to read, paper not too thin to mark, and a column over which the eye moves easily.

I find it impossible to measure my indebtedness to teachers, critics, and scholars whose lectures, conversations, and writings must have shaped the approach that I take to the short story in this volume. I must, however, mention a special indebtedness to Dorothy Heiderhoff Petty, whose insights were often invaluable; to Dan Fulkerson, who helped with the enormous task of gathering permissions and text materials; and to thousands of students who have over the years in different courses discussed with me hundreds of stories. A few, most of whom are now professionals, teaching in colleges and universities across the country, need particular acknowledgment because their relationship with me lasted over many years and many courses: Ken Cook, Jeanne and Mark DeFoe, Peggy Gardner, Greg Keeler, Jim Little, Jean Flanagan Moon, Loretta Neuman, David Overstreet, Gary Shaw, Alice and Roland Sodowsky, John Saunders, Scott Swearingen, Mary Rauch Weeks, Kay Weibel, and Larry Wharton. For their help in the early stages of this project, I also want to thank Louis Budd, Duke University; William Burke, Northern Arizona University; Roy Cornelius, Baylor University; Robert Cosgrove, Texas Tech University; Joan Nucifora, Columbia State Community College; Delma Presley, Georgia Southern College; Vernon Roberts, Kent State University; and Jodine Ryan, Adams State College. Finally, for their help in the later stages of the manuscript, I must gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Margaret Doane, California State College, San Bernardino; John S. Hines, Bowling Green University; Ken M. Symes, Western Washington State College; Joseph F. Trimmer, Ball State University; and Marianne Wilpiszewski, Prince George's Community College.

M. R.



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## \*\*\* THE SHORT STORY AS A LITERARY FORM

### *Definition*

For a form as excellent and popular as the short story has been for almost one hundred and fifty years, it has received remarkably little attention from theoreticians. We have no consensus about precisely when it originated, or, indeed, about what exactly it is. Consider some of the problems: Four men—Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Nikolai Gogol, and Edgar Allan Poe—have each at some time or another been credited with writing the first examples of the genre. The definition that most people agree on—that the short story is a piece of short prose fiction characterized by a unity of impression and a closely wrought texture—is specific only in its use of the word *short*, a word very difficult to define. But short-story writers have given little concern to a theoretician's problems and year after year have turned out stories compelling attention from general readers and scholars alike. A list of important short-story writers must include the names of almost every major writer of this and the last century.

What is it we do know? We know that something happened at the beginning of the nineteenth century to cause Brander Matthews, an American writer and

critic, later in the century to proclaim the birth of a new genre. We know that Washington Irving, writing early in the century, produced stories very loose in structure; plots moved slowly, and actions were often impeded by lengthy comments or interrupted by apparently extraneous details. In a story like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," for example, the role of the narrator is questionable, the character of Ichabod Crane is sketchily presented, and details multiply but for no apparent thematic purpose. We know that by the 1840s Nikolai Gogol was writing true short stories like "The Diary of a Madman," "The Nose," and "The Overcoat," but the stories he wrote earlier and collected in a volume like *Evenings in a Village Near Dikenka* were closer to Irving's stories—tales, they might better be called. We know that Poe's stories date from the 1840s, and we know that stories written by Hawthorne, dating from the 1830s, exhibit what later came to be recognized as typical short-story structure. Indeed, it was in a review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* that Poe wrote what is probably the first theoretical statement made about the short-story form. He said, among other things, that the story must be short enough to be read at one sitting; otherwise it will lose "the immense force derivable from totality," and he continued:

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.\*

Much emphasis has been placed by critics on Poe's concepts of "unity of effect" and "pre-established design." But these remarks concerning unity and design do little more than speak to the harmonious relationship of the parts to the whole; that is, they declare that the kind of stories Hawthorne wrote are art forms. Unity of effect is achieved by means of a coherent design, but this is true not only for short stories. Unity is achieved in all successful art forms. This part of Poe's statement, then, though important, is hardly definitive. Little attention, however, has been called to two other points Poe makes, one made in the paragraph quoted above—that the reader must read with a "kindred art"—and one made earlier in the review—that beneath the surface of the stories "a strong undercurrent of suggestion runs continuously." It is, nevertheless, to these comments that we must pay particular attention, for they are the ones that seem actually to speak to genre classification. The short story demands active reader

\* Originally published in *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* in 1842, the review from which this excerpt was taken is reprinted in *Poe*, edited by W. H. Auden (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950), p. 450.

participation in a shared experience, because meaning emerges from a story through indirect rather than direct means.

About forty years after Poe's famous review, Brander Matthews, although not citing Poe, makes statements remarkably similar. Matthews said that a new art form had been born. It was not, of course, that there had never been pieces of short prose fiction written before. Obviously the short narrative is as old as prose fiction itself. But this was a different kind of short prose narrative, Matthews insisted, the short-story (with the hyphen) as differentiated from the short story, the story merely short. It is unfortunate that we did not continue to spell with the hyphen in order to make the distinction, because short stories (stories merely short) continued to be written and, alongside of them, short stories of the new kind. And we call them all short stories, a term that causes many difficulties. Another cause of difficulty is that Matthews, like Poe, although recognizing something different, did not emphasize the real difference but insisted instead that the difference lay in the area of unity. The short story, Matthews maintained, has a unity of impression that the sketch or tale does not have and that the novel cannot have. This, of course, is nonsense. Different genres achieve unity in different ways: the novel one way and the short story another. The difference lies not in the idea of unity, but rather in the formal structure of each.

Like Poe, however, Brander Matthews suggested other conditions for defining the short story. Every student has heard these. The short story, Matthews said, deals with a single character in a single situation at a single moment in time. These conditions, for the most part, hold; though every student of the short story can think of exceptions. Still, most, indeed, the overwhelming majority of stories, deal with a single major character involved in an action that is independent and contained, where the part (the single action) radiates a whole that is not described but suggested. Story, thus, becomes metaphor, something that stands for something else, and plot is often a depiction of a state of mind.

Perhaps, then, Poe and Matthews said more in definition of the short story than they are commonly credited with, and, if we put all their statements together, we can come up with a definition more useful than the one we started with: *The short story is a piece of short prose fiction characterized by unity of effect and a closely knit texture; but because it is so tightly woven and because it is short, it demands active reader participation. Everything in a short story tends to stand for something else, and because it does meanings can multiply even though the story is usually limited to a single major character involved in a single action.*

### *Origins and Development*

Though the short story is the newest of literary genres and has a relatively recent history, it has gone through three distinct stages of development: first development in Hawthorne, Poe, Gogol, and their followers; second development in the early modern period in Anton Chekhov, Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, and their followers; and third development, best typified in Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, and their followers.



A story like "Roger Malvin's Burial" is typical of the first stage. In it Hawthorne provides a story with a plot line that moves from exposition, where Hawthorne sets the stage and introduces the characters, through complication, where the conflict of the major character, Reuben Bourne, is introduced and then intensified, to a climax, where Reuben kills his only son. Following the climax, a resolution of the conflict occurs. The plot line, the first or literal level of narration, deals with external facts, what happens, to whom, and when. But in order to understand a story by Hawthorne, it is necessary to get beyond the literal level to metaphoric levels, for the facts serve only to point toward other levels of truth. Hawthorne's stories are multivalent; that is, they project several levels of meaning. Thus, in "Roger Malvin's Burial" Hawthorne is not content to remain with any simple one-to-one relationship with Christian doctrine. Reuben sins; but what is his sin? He is punished; but what does the punishment involve? He expiates his sin; but what kind of expiation is it that involves a man's killing his only son? Another level of the story also involves guilt and expiation, but here there is subconscious guilt and subconscious expiation, and the questions involve psychological motivation. Why does Reuben feel guilty? Why, at the end, is he relieved of his feelings of guilt?

Every element of the story has its symbolic function. Reuben is son, lover, father, husband; and, as his role shifts, the roles of the other characters are altered from their obvious ones in relation to him. In this way every facet of the relationships among members of a family is explored. The plot, too, is related to the symbolic pattern, as it involves a journey out of the forest and back again. The forest is the setting of and the symbol for Reuben's subconscious drives and motives. These drives and motives originate in the forest and compel him back to the forest, where they may be released. The forest is the gigantic maze of the subconscious mind. When Reuben loses his way, he is enmeshed in his subconscious drives. The oak tree, like the forest, is a powerful symbol. When Reuben ties his bloodstained handkerchief around one of its branches, he ties it symbolically to the crime. Although the rest of the tree flourishes, this branch withers during Reuben's period of guilt and falls at the moment of his expiation.

"Roger Malvin's Burial" presents in graphic form Hawthorne's conviction that truth is an inner reality. External facts on the literal level of narration serve to reflect the real meaning of the story, which involves the symbolism of the characters as they stand in relationship to Reuben, the psychological states of Reuben's subconscious mind, the oak tree with its withered branch, and the gigantic maze of the forest. Hawthorne's avowed purpose, expressed in many of his later writings, was to get beyond the surface level of impressions, beyond ephemeral facts to something lasting, eternal. This effort of Hawthorne's to get beyond the facts provides the metaphysical base for the structure of his stories. There is always a surface level, what might be called a manifest content, which embodies symbols that must be understood before the meaning of the story is revealed. Everything in the story functions to guide the reader to an understanding of the latent content, the realm of truth.

Another point is important. Hawthorne, like Irving and Gogol, dealt mainly with problems of appearance and reality, and the surfaces of his stories, like

theirs, are filled with myths, legends, dreams (both wish-fulfilling and anxiety-laden) and with extraordinary events. Rip Van Winkle falls asleep for twenty years; Ichabod Crane meets the headless horseman and disappears without sign or trace; a man loses his nose and goes on a long search for it; a lady meets a withered crone in a hollow of three hills, dreams, and dies; a man either has a bad dream or actually takes a walk in the forest and meets the devil; compelled by a wilderness, another man kills his only son as expiation for a crime that is never named.

Poe's stories operate in a similar mode. The plot line is traditional; the events of the plot serve to embody symbolically the conflict of the major character; surface events are extraordinary, usually occurring in a dream context, where the protagonist is the dreamer. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the narrator enters a nightmare world where his own fears and anxieties are mirrored by Roderick and the House of Usher; in "Ligeia" a man in an opium haze wills to life again his dead wife; like a variegated dream the Red Death stalks the Prince Prospero and his followers.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the short-story form seems well established. Herman Melville writes two brilliant short stories, "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby the Scrivener," and Mark Twain follows with the equally brilliant but lengthy "The Mysterious Stranger." On the Continent and in England, Feodor Dostoevsky, Henry James, Guy de Maupassant, and Joseph Conrad write stories of exceptional merit, finely crafted and closely wrought.

But there were other writers, deficient in talent and inadequate in vision, who read Poe's dictum concerning pre-established design in rigid and formulistic terms. This, together with the multiplication of journals publishing short fiction, resulted in a proliferation of stories by minor authors whose products tended to become more and more formulistic. The result was that the short story almost died. "It's on its last legs," Herbert Ellsworth Cory wrote in the *Dial* in 1917. "Its technique has become more and more self-conscious. And self-consciousness is the mortal foe of true originality."

A form as vital as the short story had been in the hands of such master craftsmen as Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and Conrad, however, did not die. It lay dormant for a few years waiting for artists of equal or near equal stature to revive it. And Russia's Anton Chekhov, New Zealand's Katherine Mansfield, and Ireland's James Joyce, and the United States's Sherwood Anderson did just that.

**THE MODERN PERIOD** Broadly speaking, there are two essential differences between the stories written in the nineteenth century and those written during the first half of the twentieth century. One is the difference in the surface content of the stories; the other, the difference in plot line. Neither is a difference basic to the formal structure of the genre. In the nineteenth century, as has been mentioned, surface content tended to the unreal and/or spectacular, to extraordinary occurrences not usually experienced by ordinary people living ordinary, mundane existences. These experiences were incorporated into stories developed by a plot line in which the something that happened happened at a climactic point and afterward a resolution was effected.