

CHAPTER 1:
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A FORM OF LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION:

The short story is a form of short fictional narrative prose. Historically, the short narrative, be it in verse or prose, is one of the oldest and most widespread of literary forms. It is nearly as old as language itself. Throughout history man has enjoyed various types of brief narratives such as jests, anecdotes, studied digressions, short allegorical romances, moralizing fairy tales, short myths, and abbreviated historical legends, etc.

The short story did not really emerge as a distinct literary genre until the 19th century. It has originated from the ancient narratives. Since its birth the modern short story has gone through so many changes and has developed in full-fledged form of literature in a short time. It has a definite technique of its own, and has its own specific requirements of matter and treatment. It organizes the action, thought and dialogue of its characters into the artful pattern of plot. Thus, the short story in the hands of its modern exponents has achieved the status of a distinct genre. As a skilful artist, the modern short story writer is a close observer of life, a keen student of character, and a master of style.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHORT STORY:

The short story primarily aims at entertainment. It is a story that is short and it can be easily read at a single sitting. Hence, it should be of moderate length. In this matter the language of the short story should be a model of economy. The language of the short story should be easy and simple. Every word in it should contribute to its effect. However, the short story should be clear in outline and complete in itself. It is usually concerned with a single effect conveyed in a single significant episode or scene, involving a small number of characters, sometimes only one. It must have singleness of effect and this unity of effect can be achieved by the combination of incident and tone in different ways such as plot, technique, imagination, attitude towards subject, etc. The short story must also have sense of place and time. As Hudson points out, the short story should have unity of motive, of purpose, of action and also unity of impression. He says:

It may be laid down as a rule to which, so far as I see, there can be no exception, that a short story must contain one and only one informing idea, and that this idea must be worked out to its logical conclusion with absolute singleness of aim and directness of method.¹

The subject of a short story must be one that can be adequately and effectively developed within the prescribed limits. It should impress us as absolutely clear in outline, well proportioned; full enough for

the purpose yet without the slightest suggestion of crowding, and within its own framework complete. All this contributes in the making of a good short story. Thus, a good short story contains deliberately selected details and incidents. Sean O'Faolain emphasises the same point when he says:

The truth about the good short story is poetical; it lies in a pointed vision, a sort of *eclaircissement* of an inward eye-flick, the fixing of an unforgettable 'thing seen'.²

Therefore, it can be said that the short story makes a single impression on the reader, it does so by concentrating on a crisis, and it makes that crisis pivotal in a controlled plot.

SOME DEFINITIONS OF THE SHORT STORY:

The definitions of short story range in a wide variety. As definitions of literary forms change with the passage of time, so has been with the definitions of short story. *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* defines the short story as "a narrative prose story presenting a central theme or impression, usually subordination to a single mood or characterization: shorter than a novel or novelette, usually under 10,000 words."³ *The Oxford Companion to the English language* states that the short story is "a fictional narrative brief enough to be transmitted at a single hearing or reading"⁴.

The short story has also been defined by its many exponents. For instance, John Hadfield has described the short story as "a story that is not long".⁵ According to Sir Hugh Walpole, "A short story should be a story: a record of things happening, full of incident and accident, swift movement, unexpected development, leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement".⁶ In this context A. J. J. Ratcliff says that the short story is a deliberately fashioned work of art, and not just a straightforward tale of one or more events.⁷

R. L. Stevenson clearly brings out the distinction between the story of plot, the story of character, and the story of impression when he says:

There are three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly you may take a certain atmosphere, and get actions and persons to realise it.⁸

While defining the short story, Elizabeth Bowen writes:

The short story, that is to say, must spring from an impression or perception pressing enough, acute enough, to have made the writer write.⁹

Somerset Maugham focuses on the structural aspects of the short story and remarks:

A short story should be a finished product of art with a beginning, middle and an end.¹⁰

H. G. Wells, himself a master of the story-teller's art, describes the short story covering nearly all the important aspects of the genre except 'conflict'. He writes:

A short story is, or should be, a simple thing; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to attend closely therefore set a limit to it: it must explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue sets in.¹¹

All the definitions of the short story fall short in one or other aspects of the short story. This occurs due to the immense growth of the form in different directions and on all levels. However, all writers unanimously agree that the short story must be brief and precise and it must deal with one single effect. Hence, it would be appropriate to come to the conclusion with what Poe, the father of the modern short story, says about the short story because his definition of the short story appears to be a comprehensive one. Poe writes:

A skilful 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 thus invents such incidents-- he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing the preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tends not to the upbringing of this effect, then he has failed in the 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 the kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the Tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem, but undue length is yet to be mere avoided.¹²

THE SHORT STORY AND OTHER FORMS OF LITERATURE:

Until recently the short story has been considered as a rival to the novel. However, the case is not so because the short story and the novel are two entirely different forms of literary art, each having its own rules of composition, its own usefulness and importance. Even their limitations put them in a unique category of their own form. Therefore, the two arts were never rivals but, on the contrary, they were to develop side by side.

The short story as a form of literature is akin to the drama in terms of brevity. Both, the drama and the short story, require a long preliminary discipline in techniques such as extreme condensation and extreme economy of words. But the two differ in their methods of characterization and their approach to the subject as the objective or impersonal approach in case of drama and both subjective and objective approach in case of the short story. The short story also has affinities with the narrative ballad; with the lyric and the sonnet. It has also shown itself to be more closely allied to painting and cinema than to the stage. According to A. E. Coppard the short story

and the film are expressions of the same art, the art of telling a story by a series of subtly implied gestures, swift shots, moments of suggestion, an art in which elaboration and above all explanation are superfluous and tedious.¹³ The same has rightly been expressed by Elizabeth Bowen when she says:

The short story... in its use of action is nearer to the drama than to the novel. The cinema, itself busy with a technique, is of the same generation: in the last thirty years the two arts have been accelerating together. They have affinities--- neither is sponsored by a tradition; both are, accordingly, free: both, still, are self-conscious, show a self-imposed discipline and regard for form; both have, to work on, immense matter--- the disorientated romanticism of the age.¹⁴

THE POPULARITY OF THE SHORT STORY:

The short story has firmly established itself as a favourite form in modern literature. It has developed into immense variety and, as a result, we have different types of short stories such as the love story, the adventure story, the detective story, the psychological story, the scientific story, the social story, etc. The short story is the most popular form today because of the speed of modern life and spread of education. The growth in the number of journals and magazines is also responsible for the overall popularity of the short story in the modern times. H. E. Bates gives one more reason for the popularity of the short story. According to him, the short story can be seen not as a product evolved by generations of writers

united in a revolutionary intention to get the short story more simply, more economically, and more truthfully written, but as something shaped also by readers, by social expansion, and by what Miss Bowen calls "peaks of common experience".¹⁵ According to Bates, readers live and perhaps succeed in raising, by an infinitely small fraction, the level of common experience and artistic receptivity. Hence, he comments:

The evolution of the short story has something to do with the evolution of the general reader".¹⁶

In this connection it is what Miss Elizabeth Bowen says matters a lot. She says:

For the future lies not with the artist only; the reader and the critic have a share in it. If the short story is to keep a living dignity, and is not to be side-tracked into preciousness, popular impatience on the one hand and minority fervour on the other will have to be kept in check. The present state of the short story is, on the whole, healthy: its prospects are good.¹⁷

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY IN AMERICA:

The short story had its literary beginning in America in the *Sketch Book* (1820) of Washington Irving. Later, Nathaniel Hawthorne made it a serious art form. But, above all, Edgar Allan Poe was the first great master of the modern short story, for he propounded and followed the theory of the short story. Poe, the father of science fiction, is rightly called the father of the modern

short story as well. It was he who brought the short story to a point of technical perfection. He was the first man of undoubted talent and distinguished force of temperament. The only defect in Poe was that he was not interested in the ordinary; his joy was in the extraordinary. He had won a considerable reputation as a poet, critic and writer of strange stories. He was a writer of great power and this is very much obvious from his work. Among others O'Henry, Brete Harte, William Faulkner, Henry James, O'Brian, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway and Stephen Crane made remarkable contribution to the development of the short story in America.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY IN RUSSIA:

The short story was developed to the full extent in Russia by the writers like Nicolai Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Gorky, Anton Chekhov, Alexander Pushkin and others. Of these, Nicolai Gogol, the father of the short story, is above all called the father of all writers. He took the short story some way back to the folk tale and in doing so bound it to the earth. He was notable in that he wrote of ordinary people, apparent nonentities, with attentiveness capable of revealing deep currents of emotion beneath petty surfaces. Gogol says:

I believe the lives of ordinary human folk, rich or poor, adventurous or parochial, good or depraved, dull or exciting, constitute the only vein of material a writer need ever seek to work.¹⁸

Gogol's influence has rightly been acclaimed by Turgenev when he remarks:

We have all come out from under Gogol's
Overcoat.¹⁹

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY IN ENGLAND:

In England it was in the beginning of the 20th century that the short story became popular. Rudyard Kipling pioneered the short story writing and imparted originality to it. He is one of the great masters of the short story. He has considerable genius which is reflected from his hundreds of short stories which are collected in his volumes of short stories: *Plain Tales From the Hills* (1888), *Soldiers Three* (1888), *The Phantom Rickshaw* (1888), *Many Inventions* (1893), *Debits and Credits* (1926). H. G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, Arnold Bennett, D. H. Lawrence, R. L. Stevenson, Agatha Christie, Katherine Mansfield, V. S. Prichett, Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, Joseph Conrad, A. E. Coppard, John Galsworthy, G. K. Chesterton, E. M. Forster and others were the major craftsmen of the short story in England.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY IN AUSTRALIA:

The short story in Australia has flourished mostly in the 1890s, the 1940s and the end of the 1960s. It can be claimed that the general level of achievement in Australian short story in the

inter-war years is higher than in the novel. The work of a group of short story writers is very significant. The group consists of Vance Palmer, Gavin Casey, Frank Dalby Davison, Alan Marshall, Dal Stivens, Peter Cowan and John Morrison. Though these writers produced their best work in other forms, the aim in their short stories is usually unerring and there is ease, balance, economy and freshness in their art.

The consistently high standard of achievement of the Australian short story is mainly due to many reasons. The short story, firstly, can be made to seem much more nearly a part of the ordinary flow of things. Secondly, it centres briefly and directly upon actual experience, upon what happens. It offers the man himself, responding directly to the challenge of the job or of nature or his wife's nagging. Thirdly, there does seem an affinity between the best of the Australian short stories and the work of the Russian masters, Gogol and Gorky being sources of inspiration. Hence, the Australian short story writers gained some support from awareness that their own preferences coincided with the responses of great figures in the Russian tradition. This awareness would enhance their confidence that they were touching matters of universal import that they were writing about the common man in the widest sense of the term. So, their stories are quintessentially Australian in flavour and

intention. Thus, for Judah Waten, as for the other authors, the short story is essentially an episode of day to day reality, a picking up of psychological, social and moral intimations from the ordinary and accidental run of things. At last, most importantly, the Australian short story writers followed what is called the Lawson tradition, so named in homage to Henry Lawson, the greatest of all Australian exponents of the short story. Henry Lawson's work opened up possibilities of a seemingly boundless and certainly exhilarating sort for others.

Let us see the contribution of some major writers to the development of the Australian short story:

1) HENRY LAWSON (1867-1922):

Henry Lawson was originally esteemed as a poet. However, his natural instinct was for the sketch and short story. He took the side of the down-trodden, the unfortunate and the dispossessed. His work was published in the story collections *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (1894), *While the Billy Boils* (1896), *On the Track* (1900), *Over the Sliprails* (1900), *The Country I Come From* (1901) *Joe Wilson and his Mates* (1901) and *Children of the Bush* (1902). His stories are remembered for their image of the bush worker, his desolate country, oppressive circumstances and stubbornly enduring wry humour. They express loneliness and isolation. Thus,

Lawson has an apocalyptic vision of the unemployed being transformed into "a swollen river that has broken bank and wall"²⁰, advancing with the red flags over all... bright with revolution's heat. Some of Lawson's most accomplished stories are to be found in his first published volume, *Short stories in Prose and Verse* (1894). 'The Drover's Wife', 'The Union Buries its Dead', 'The Bush Undertaker' and these together with the 'Joe Wilson' stories are the core of his achievement. Thus, Lawson came to write with a lightly sketched but unmistakable authorial voice and a self-awareness of the playfulness inherent in story-telling. He impresses us with his sympathetic insight and by the mastery of tone and the control of language.

2) VANCE PALMER (1885-1959):

Vance Palmer is known as an essayist, editor, critic and commentator, poet, dramatist, novelist and short story writer. He wrote several romantic novels which include *The Outpost* (1924), *The Man Hamilton* (1928), *Men are Human* (1930), and *The Passage* (1930). His most notable the Macy Donovan trilogy consists of *Golconda* (1948), *Seedtime* (1957) and *The Big Fellow* (1959). However, his novels, in particular, lack both variety and spontaneity. They lack the sense of life itself. His instinct for the revealing aside, and the brief character study, as well as a certain

staleness that develops from the languishing extent of his novels, all signal that his forte is the short story. His lyricism, his preference for the revealing significant experience, and the natural reach of his imagination are more happily accommodated in the modest limits of the short story. The best of his stories are those of adolescence or late childhood. His best stories include 'The Rainbow Bird', 'The Foal'. Palmer argued for nationalism in literature. He maintains that art interprets life, and literature in Australia, if it is to become accomplished literature, must express Australia. He writes:

Art is really man's interpretation of the inner life of his surroundings, and until the Australian writer can attune his ear to catch the various undertones of our national life, our art must be false and unenduring.²¹

3) GAVIN CASEY (1907-64):

Gavin Casey grew up in the Western Australia gold-mining town of Kalgoorlie. His stories are collected in the volumes, *It's Harder for Girls* (1942) and *Bird of a Feather* (1943). Casey wrote out of his own experience, often about economic insecurity and loneliness, the experience of finding life becoming oppressive and rushing off for a few beers. His narrators tend to be loners, even when among their mates and sometimes they are barely aware that their wives and children are even more alienated than themselves.

Casey's area is well defined as his stories are placed on the

goldfields in the more recent times of large-scale industrialized exploitation. His stories are all of hard times and humble people who hope for that 'bit of comfort and security'. Above all, they are a very sensitive documentation of the processes of the human conscience. The uneasy awareness of being caught up is at the core of Casey's best stories. Casey is master of another mode of the short story, the Australian tall tale which was developed into an art form by Dal Stivens and Frank Hardy.

4) FRANK DALBY DAVISON (1893-1970):

Frank Dalby Davison wrote a number of short stories in the Palmer manner, outwardly relaxed, but the control which ought to have emerged from within the shaping of the experience is, instead, asserted in the narration. His stories, like Casey's and Morrison's, explore aspects of Australian maleness. They also make glad acknowledgement of the strength of human and animal sexuality. In his stories there is also an awareness of the nature of woman, and of just how that nature can be thwarted by male arrogance and disregard.

Davison's stories are collected in his volume *The Road to Yesterday* which is, in the main, an exploration of an area of experience dominated by the notion of male prowess. Most importantly, Davison's stories stress the limits of the unstated male

ordinances, revealing the situations they do not adequately cover and those where masculinity seems close to simple brutality. They assert that a man's virtue lies not only in meeting obstacles, human, animal or inanimate in a fearless way, but also in lack of show, self containment, taciturnity, the refusal to complain. Davison is also popularly known for his novels *Manshy* (1931) and *Dusty* (1946).

5) ALAN MARSHALL (1902-84):

Alan Marshall wrote both stories and travel documentaries. He has been a singularly successful author, with over four million copies of his books sold, including translations into over forty languages. He won the short-story prize of the Australian Literature Society in 1933.

Alan Marshall's fame rests upon his evocations of childhood in his two volumes of short stories, *Tell us About the Turkey, Joe* (1946), *How's Andy Going?* (1956), and on the first volume of his autobiography, *I Can Jump Puddles* (1955). Marshall shares more with Kylie Tennant than the other exponents of the short story a belief in innocence as a positive and exciting state of being. They both believe that at the root of human existence there is a bubbling capacity for wonder, for discovery, for the enjoyment of freedom that being alive bestows in spite of all pains. Marshall is also a specialist in the 'tall story', the tale of much-more-than-life-size-doings, far, far out in the outback.

Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles* has the gentleness and immediacy of the best stories. It is an autobiography with the narrative development and character interest of a novel. It is about the making of Basic Australian Man.

6) DAL STIVENS (1911- 97):

Dal Stivens represents two strands of Australian story-telling, the tall tale which originated in the nineteenth century and the more recent strand of fantasy and fabulism. He is that *rara avis* of Australian fiction, an experimentalist. His novel *Jimmy Brockett* (1951) is subtitled *The Portrait of a Notable Australian* which indicates that it offers a narrative refinement of the fact-fiction equation. It is based upon the life of an actual Sydney racketeer. His *A Horse of Air* is also a much acclaimed novel.

Stivens' volumes of short stories, the titles of which indicate their comic and exaggerative tendencies, are *The Courtship of Uncle Henry* (1946), *The Gambling Ghost* (1953), *Ironbark Bill* (1955) and *The Scholarly Mouse* (1957). He typically practises imaginative extravagance more than straightforward exaggeration in his short stories. He is also noted for his tall tales about cricket. These stories are collected in his volume *The Demon Bowler and Other Cricket Stories* (1979).

7) PETER COWAN (1914- 2002):

Peter Cowan is a more substantial writer who chooses to register emotional flatness in his fiction. In his stories there is little kinship between man and working mate and nothing of the response to work, to the job-in-hand that may lift the spirits of Casey's or Davison's working men. The central character is likely to be of a solitary nature. The characters are, in the main, people living not far above the level of bare subsistence. Humankind is pinned down in one form or another. However, the virtue of Cowan's best stories is that they reveal how such conditions may bring about a quickening of mutual awareness on the part of man and woman. People are weighed down, defeated by those formidable forces of isolation, of vast, unheeding distance, of thin indifferent soil, the same forces that hastened Richard Mahony's insanity and soured Cabell's manhood in 'Landtakers'. But these forces cannot kill the need for love, sympathy or communication at the very least. They can only increase it. This is exhibited in Cowan's short stories which are collected in his volumes, *Drift* (1944), *The Unploughed Land* (1958), *The Empty Street* (1965), and *The Tins and Other Stories* (1973). His stories tend to be a studied dwelling on the finer details of a scene or relationship.

8) JOHN MORRISON (1904- 98):

John Morrison, though somewhat less consistent in his achievement, is a writer of social realist stories. He is as well known for his wharf side stories as Casey is for his goldfields ones. He has the enviable ability to create expectation and suspense without sacrificing the subtlety of his characters to the exigencies of the plot.

Morrison's best stories are found in his volumes of short stories, *Sailors Belong Ships* (1947), *Twenty-three* (1962) and *North Wind* (1982). His stories are largely based on his experiences of working as a wharfie and gardener, his experience of unions, and his encounters travelling to work. They clearly belong to the age of ideology. Morrison has a humane sense of the complexity of life, a militantly anti-capitalist outlook, and a strong belief in the oppression of the individual by the institutions.

9) NICHOLAS HASLUCK (1942-):

Nicholas Hasluck is a prolific and prize-winning author of novels, poetry, essays, dramas and short stories. He is a productive and challenging regional writer. His early novels are largely concerned with the examination of the institutions of society, the way they function and the human dimensions and dilemmas they raise. His later novels, however, explore the boundaries between literature and history, and they are more regional in focus. His work

is more inspired by his extensive international travel or historical setting (real or imagined) with contemporary resonance. It increasingly uses the marginal regional narratives of Western Australia to contest the mega narratives of the West. His highly acclaimed novels are *Quarantine* (1979), *The Blue Guitar* (1980), *The Bellarmine Jug* (1984) and *The Country without Music* (1990). Hasluck's popularity also rests on his short stories, for they deal with variety of themes and they form important background to his novels. In the present dissertation a modest attempt is made to study his short stories from the thematic point of view. The focus of the present study is on major themes that are manipulated in his short stories with particular reference to his contribution to the genre.

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